

## WHAT IS BIRTH TRAUMA?

Birth trauma refers to both Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and symptoms of trauma which do not meet a full PTSD diagnosis. Around 1 in 25 women experience PTSD following childbirth, while it is estimated that around 1/3 of women find some aspect of their birth traumatic but may not meet a diagnosis of PTSD. What is crucial is that birth trauma is 'in the eye of the beholder' - the traumatic experience is entirely subjective.

Common symptoms of birth trauma include: experiencing flashbacks, nightmares or intrusive thoughts related to the birth or the period around the birth; avoiding talking about the birth or avoiding reminders of the birth; feeling irritable, jumpy or agitated; noticing changes in mood.

For some, these symptoms are not noticed until some months after the birth - or are managed until they become too difficult to overcome, for example when planning a subsequent pregnancy.

Birth trauma doesn't just affect the mother or birthing person. It can also affect birth partners, family members, friends and healthcare professionals.

## KEY POINTS

Birth Trauma is not the same as Post Natal Depression and should be treated differently

Current recommendations for treatment are trauma-focused CBT or EMDR. Any treatment should begin with safety and stabilisation to help regain control over the symptoms of trauma. Medication is not currently recommended by the NICE guidance unless other treatment has been declined (although some do find it very helpful)

Many people benefit from using a range of different approaches, which might include body therapies, medication, holistic techniques as well as psychotherapeutic approaches

Birth trauma is treatable, and often preventable. Interpersonal factors, such as perceived support, are highly related linked to trauma after birth

## WHAT CAN I DO RIGHT NOW?

If you feel that you may be suffering from birth trauma, please speak to someone you trust. This might be a healthcare professional, friend or family member. You can recover from a traumatic birth.

If you are a professional working with parents or parents to be, please look at our other resources and training opportunities. We know that birth trauma can often be prevented - kindness is key.



**B**e open to listening to people's birth experiences, with no judgement

**I**nform - birth trauma affects 30% of women & can affect birth partners, family members & staff

**R**efer – people to the free resources available on our site

**T**rain – ask your local services if they need birth trauma training

**H**elp – signpost people to health professionals, the Birth Trauma Association, Birthrights or AIMS

### FURTHER READING



- Websites: The Birth Trauma Association, Association for Improvements in Maternity Services, Birthrights, Unfold Your Wings
- Books: How to Heal A Bad Birth (Bruijn & Gould), Birth Trauma (K Thomas), Why Birth Trauma Matters (E Svanberg)
- There is a research database at the website of the International Network for Perinatal PTSD Research (City University)
- Please look at all of the resources on the Make Birth Better website