



BIRTH-RELATED TRAUMA EXPLAINED

This resource contains information on physical and psychological symptoms that can occur following a traumatic birth experience.



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What is birth-related trauma?

Birth-related trauma is a trauma or injury - whether physical or psychological - that occurs at any time in connection with pregnancy, labour and birth or in the postnatal period. Birth-related trauma affects as many as 1 in 3 birthing parents in Australia and can have psychological, emotional and physical impacts.

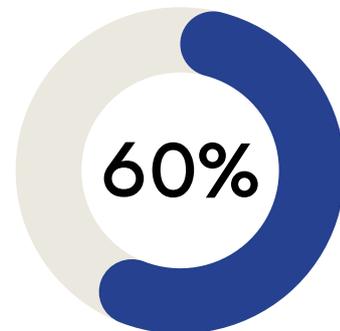
Fathers, non-birthing parents, as well as others witnessing a traumatic birth can also experience birth-related trauma. Experiences of trauma are unique, and what may be traumatic for one person may not be traumatic for another. If your birth experience felt traumatic to you, then it was. We want you to know you are not alone and there is support available. Please seek help if you are experiencing any of the symptoms outlined below.

Signs and symptoms of birth-related trauma

Birth Injuries (physical birth-related trauma)

Birth injuries can include:

- Pain around the site of the episiotomy or tear in the perineum (between vagina & anus) after birth
- Bladder damage
- Coccydynia (any type of persistent tailbone pain)
- Dragging/heavy feeling in the pelvis or a sense that something is 'falling out'
- Pelvic organ prolapse
- Pelvic floor muscle damage or muscle laxity
- Incontinence/leaking of wee or poo
- Infected stitches
- Pudendal neuralgia (nerve pain/damage)
- Wound dehiscence (wound breakdown/separation)
- Hysterectomy (removal of womb/uterus)
- Postpartum haemorrhage (PPH)/ Secondary PPH
- Other injuries that may not have been categorised.



Research suggests that approximately 60% of first-time mothers experience physical trauma during vaginal delivery. Physical birth trauma can result in a variety of symptoms that may negatively impact quality of life.

If something doesn't feel right, ask your health professional.



Psychological birth-related trauma

Symptoms of psychological birth-related trauma can include:

- Feelings of intense fear, helplessness or distress in reaction to reminders of the experience, e.g. words, smells, rooms, clinicians
- Fear and anxiety about going outside
- Struggling to bond with your baby
- Flashbacks
- Trying to push feelings away and get on with looking after your baby
- Difficulty sleeping due to bad memories or reminders of the birth
- Nightmares regarding the birth
- Irritability and guilt
- Anxiety or panic attacks
- Avoiding reminders of the traumatic birth, such as the location where it occurred (avoidance reactions)
- Feeling emotionally numb or detached from others, activities, or your surroundings
- Sweating, shaking, headaches, dizziness, gastrointestinal discomfort and chest pains not connected with a medical condition
- Noticing changes in mood.

Psychological birth-related trauma can present as:

- Postnatal depression or anxiety (PNDA)
- Post-partum post-traumatic stress disorder (PPTSD)
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Read more about birth-related post-traumatic stress disorder on the ABTA website.

Please seek help if you are experiencing any of the symptoms or signs of birth-related trauma above, whether physical or psychological, or both. You might like to talk to your GP, midwife or health visitor about how you feel. You can contact us at ABTA to find out more about support for yourself and your family by emailing support@birthtrauma.org.au



@birthtrauma.org.au



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