



The Facts About Traumatic Birth and How You Can Feel Better

Many expectant parents have an idea of how they would like their childbirth to go. But sometimes, childbirth doesn't happen the way we think it will. Even with good medical care, childbirth can be overwhelming, or even scary. If this sounds like your experience, you aren't alone. In fact, up to a third of women have what is called a traumatic childbirth, and there are concrete things you can do to heal from your trauma and feel greater peace.

How do I know if my delivery was traumatic?

If you answer yes to one or more of the questions below, you may have experienced a traumatic childbirth.

- Did you feel like your providers did not communicate well with you during labor and birth?
- Did you feel like they were not listening to you or you did not know what was happening?
- Did you feel ignored by the medical providers?
- Were you physically restrained during birth?
- Were medical things done during labor and delivery that you did not want or did not agree to?
- Did you feel like you or your baby might die at any point?
- Did you feel helpless during your labor or birth or soon after birth?
- Did you feel detached from your body during or after delivery?
- Did you/do you have trouble bonding with your baby?

What are the symptoms of traumatic childbirth?

Not everyone who has a traumatic childbirth has trauma. But, if you find yourself feeling some of the feelings below, you may want to talk to someone you can trust like a relative, religious leader, support group or maternal mental health therapist.

- Feeling "edgy" or "jumpy, like you have a lot of nervous energy and cannot relax.
- Being on high alert for something being wrong with your baby or your health.
- Feeling somehow to blame or guilty for how your birth went.
- Trying to avoid any reminder of your birth, which might mean you do not want to go to follow-up appointments or skip them or that you don't want to go anywhere near the place where you delivered your baby.
- Having a hard time talking about your birth with anyone.
- Having mixed feelings about your baby's birthday or other reminders of the day you gave birth.



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- Not being able to sleep well: trouble falling asleep, frequent wake ups, being kept awake by worries, feeling restless, or having nightmares.
- Having memories of your birth which pop up when you don't want them to and make you feel sad or edgy. Racing thoughts that you want to get away from.

Who is most likely to have a traumatic childbirth?

Black parents are most likely to experience a traumatic childbirth. There are many reasons for this. Black patients are more likely to die in childbirth because of untreated medical conditions and are less able to get quality prenatal and obstetric care where they live and deliver. For example, Black patients have higher rates of emergency caesareans and postpartum hemorrhage (severe and life-threatening bleeding after childbirth). Additionally, racism and racial bias affect how Black, Indigenous, and People of color (BIPOC) are treated overall in the U.S. healthcare system and studies reveal that pain and medical concerns are often ignored.

Though Black patients are at greater risk, traumatic childbirth can occur in any delivery, especially if you experienced any of the following:

- Having a difficult, long or painful labor and delivery.
- Having medical procedures you did not expect, such as an emergency caesarean, or an assisted birth using tools such as suction or forceps.
- If you or your baby needed special medical attention during labor and delivery or afterward.
- If you or your baby was injured during labor or delivery.
- If you lost your baby to stillbirth or they died soon after delivery.
- Any other kinds of complications after your delivery, such as heavy bleeding, or needing a surgery to remove extra placenta.

What can I do to recover from my traumatic birth?

The first step is knowing that you aren't alone and your trauma is real. If your childbirth experience is upsetting to you, it is important that you talk with someone you trust, such as a relative, friend, religious leader or maternal mental health therapist.

If you believe that you have trauma from your childbirth experience, there are mental health providers who can help you to heal and recover. Getting professional support for childbirth trauma can help you feel better in your body, bond with your baby, and move into parenthood with greater strength. New parents are very busy, but taking the time now to heal your pain can help you manage the challenges of parenthood now and into the future.

If you are having thoughts of harming yourself or your baby, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, available 24 hours a day in English and in Spanish at: 800-273-8255