

# Birth Trauma and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) following childbirth

There are many reasons why trauma leaves such a big impact on us emotionally.

We may have reacted differently in a crisis from how we expected. Trauma occurs suddenly and without warning. We have no time to adjust to this new experience and we are faced with not knowing what to do or how to behave.

Your mind holds onto the memory of the trauma to try and ensure that you never get into that situation again. This results in post-traumatic stress reactions.

The symptoms of PTSD include:

- nightmares
- flashbacks
- panic attacks
- sleeping problems
- lack of emotions
- severe irritability or anger.

The symptoms can develop straight after the birth or months afterwards.

You may experience physiological and psychological reactions to reminders of the birth, including seeing the birthplace and anniversaries of the event.

It is important to understand that the reactions you are experiencing are very common following trauma. They are not a sign of 'weakness' or 'losing it'. The following suggestions may help you begin to cope with the post traumatic reactions.

Try and find out as much as you can about what really happened. This will allow you to piece together a picture and understanding of the birth

more clearly. Talk to you partner or birth partner and ask them their view of the birth's events.

You may feel the birth trauma has altered your whole view of life. It is helpful to try and clarify how you now feel and talking can help you do this. Some women talk to their partner, friend, family member or approach their own General Practitioner. Some women find it helps to write down their experiences.

You may wish to contact the Hospital to go through your hospital records to try and find out what went wrong, and why these things were done to you. You will want to talk through the labour and link your experience with the hospital notes. Learning all the details of what happened, what interventions were used and why, although painful, can provide a sense of closure. If you are concerned about talking to a health professional, consider asking a close friend or family member to come with you for support.

A New Zealand website that can direct you to relevant resources is Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Aotearoa – [www.pada.nz](http://www.pada.nz). Also [www.tabs.org.nz](http://www.tabs.org.nz) (Trauma and Birth Stress).

## Other websites you might find useful:

Post & Ante Natal Stress Support:

[www.postnataldistress.org.nz](http://www.postnataldistress.org.nz)

DIY Father NZ: [www.diyfather.com](http://www.diyfather.com)

Mothers Matter: [www.mothersmatter.co.nz](http://www.mothersmatter.co.nz)

Psychosis Support NZ: [www.pnpsupport.org.nz](http://www.pnpsupport.org.nz)

Proactive Parents: [www.proactiveparents.co.nz](http://www.proactiveparents.co.nz)

Plunket: [www.plunket.org.nz](http://www.plunket.org.nz)