

Clinical Health Psychology

Women's Health

133 St John's Way
London N19 3RQ

Phone: 020 7527 1538

Cim-tr.WhittingtonCHP@nhs.net

Birth Reflection Service

Whittington Antenatal Clinic

Phone: 020 7288 5586 / 5249

Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)

If you have a compliment, complaint or concern please contact our PALS team on 020 7288 5551 or whh-tr.whitthealthPALS@nhs.net

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this leaflet please contact us on 020 7288 3182. We will try our best to meet your needs.

[Twitter.com/WhitHealth](https://twitter.com/WhitHealth)

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Whittington Health NHS Trust

Magdala Avenue
London

N19 5NF

Phone: 020 7272 3070

www.whittington.nhs.uk

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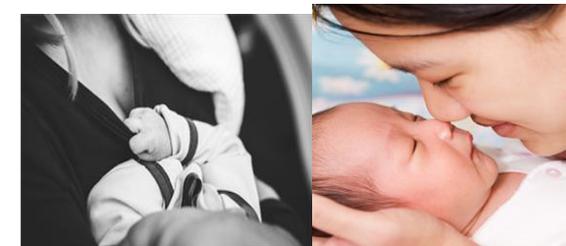
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What to Expect after Giving Birth



whittington health maternity voices
listening to parents:
change through partnership



Giving birth is a life-changing experience in many ways and is likely to affect, not only your body and having new responsibilities in life, but also your feelings and emotional wellbeing. You might have mixed feelings towards your birth experience or towards becoming a mother. Your feelings might be “up and down” and “all over the place”, which is normal and part of the adjustment to the new life situation. It is important to understand what is normal and when to seek help. This leaflet is designed to validate your experience and help you consider whether you might need some help after a difficult birth experience.



Created by Karen Kleiman and Molly McIntyre for The Postpartum Stress Center
postpartumstress.com

Useful Websites and other resources

If you would like more information or support after giving birth please visit the following websites:

www.birthtraumaassociation.org.uk

www.twainmind.org

www.elefriends.org.uk



If the post-traumatic symptoms are not fading away and getting less frequent **a month** after giving birth you should contact your GP or your Whittington Health professional who can advise you on psychological treatments or medication.

If you have any symptoms, related to your birth experience, which affect your daily life and functioning speak to your health visitor to arrange a debriefing with a midwife.

If you are unsure whether you should speak to someone, please contact your GP or any other health professional to discuss further.



If, for any reason, you need immediate support – if you are feeling unsafe or overwhelmed with worry or distress and feel at risk – please get in touch with your GP or go straight to your nearest A&E where they will be able to give you the help and support you need.

What is a traumatic birth?

Traumatic birth may be caused by any of these:

- Physical symptoms (e.g. severe tear)
- Complications (e.g. Emergency caesarean or ventouse /forceps assisted birth)
- Feeling powerless or unclear what happened during the birth
- Disappointment of birth not going as you planned

The effects of traumatic birth and how everyone copes with difficult feelings or traumatic memories differ from woman to woman. Some women go through upsetting or scary experiences without developing any symptoms afterwards and others might find themselves experiencing post-traumatic symptoms after events that might not initially feel too frightening or traumatising.

After traumatic birth it is **normal** to have immediate feelings of:

- Shock and disbelief
- Fear
- Guilt

These feelings may **fade away with time** but for some women they might persist or new feelings might develop such as:

- Anger
- Grief and mourning
- Resentment
- Isolation
- Worry about bonding with the baby
- Post traumatic symptoms

How can I better cope with these feelings?

- Talk to someone close to you or a health care professional like your GP, midwife or health visitor
- Contact the hospital to arrange an appointment with the birth reflection team to look at the birth notes
- Try to stay physically active as much as possible and continue with social contacts as much as you can:
 - Parent and baby groups (Bright Beginnings, manorgardenscentre.org) etc
 - Local children's centres

When to seek help?

It is normal, even though uncomfortable or upsetting, to have the following post-traumatic stress symptoms after a traumatic birth.

- **Intrusive memories** in a form of flashbacks, images, dreams or nightmares. You might feel anxious or panicky and have difficulties in remembering parts of the birth due to blanking them from your memory.
- **Avoiding triggers.** You might stop going to your hospital appointments due to the hospital building bringing back the traumatic memories. Avoidance might further increase your anxiety.
- **Sleep problems, mood swings, being easily startled or alarmed and loss of concentration.**
- **Fear of it happening again.** You might worry about you or your baby even dying if you have another pregnancy.

It is important to note that many women experience these symptoms but still do not develop postnatal post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It is only diagnosed if there are multiple **persistent** symptoms which are **affecting daily life** and functioning.