

# Patients - PTSD

## Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder | Information for Parents

### What is post-traumatic stress disorder?

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a psychiatric condition that occurs after a life threatening or frightening event. Memories of the trauma can remain with you for weeks, months or even years after the event. A trauma affects your brain, causing your emotions and physical responses to function differently. Experiencing or witnessing any life-threatening event can cause PTSD. Military combat, natural disaster, assault, accidents, or childbirth are examples. For some people, even witnessing these events can cause PTSD.

### What are the signs of PTSD?

Symptoms of PTSD can be different for people who experience the same trauma or the same kind of trauma. The symptoms can be divided into several different categories:

Category	Symptoms	Clarification
Intrusion	Involuntary and recurrent memories	Find yourself thinking about the trauma when you don't want to (e.g. in class, while watching a movie).
	Nightmares	Bad dreams, especially where you feel you are going to be hurt or you are trapped.
	Flashbacks	Your memories make you feel as if you are in the midst of the traumatic event again.
Avoidance	Avoid things related to the trauma	
	Thoughts	You try not to think about what happened to you.
	Feelings	You feel numb.
	People	You avoid individuals who may make you remember the event.

	Places	You won't go to places that remind you of the event.
	Objects	You avoid things that make you recall the event.
	Situations	You don't want to do things that will make you remember what happened.
Thinking changes	Poor memory	Can't recall what happened or can't recall new events.
	Poor concentration	Can't pay attention at work or school.
Mood changes	Lack of interest in activities	You put yourself in seclusion.
	Feel distant from others	Even with friends and family you feel as if you are separated.
Feeling tense	Can't feel happy or positive emotions	Always sad. You can't enjoy things you typically would.
	Irritability	Easily angered and short tempered.
	Fearful	You feel as if people will hurt you, you're always looking over your shoulder.
	Elevated startle	When someone surprises you, you jump, your heart races, you shake.
	Sleep problems	Unable to fall asleep or stay asleep, you've become a "light sleeper."

## How can PTSD affect childbirth?

Patients in labor frequently undergo intimate examinations and procedures. Things like blood, pain, and loud noises, which are common in childbirth, may trigger traumatic memories. There may be a lot of activity surrounding the laboring patient or newborn. Some patients may be panicky or overwhelmed by emotions, while others may be numb or "zoned out."

## How does birth-related PTSD differ from other forms of PTSD?

In birth-related PTSD, patients may find the experience difficult to talk about. It may be difficult to see reminders of childbirth on television or in movies. Memories may be vivid and intense, or difficult to recall.

New parents may have difficulty bonding with the baby or feel uncomfortable with their infant. Or they may be overly attentive to the baby, excessively anxious that something may happen to the baby, and unable to allow the baby out of their sight even to sleep. Parents often feel ashamed or guilty, or feel numb. It is common to have depression or anxiety after a traumatic birth.

## What causes birth-related PTSD?

Each individual defines traumatic differently. Common emergency procedures or even routine interventions during labor may be traumatic. Unplanned events such as an emergency cesarean or having a child need medical intervention may be traumatic. Prior trauma, poor support, and depression during pregnancy may be risks for traumatic childbirth.

## What treatments are available for PTSD?

Medications may be helpful in managing symptoms related to PTSD and associated depression and anxiety. It is not unusual to try to numb the pain of the trauma by using drugs or alcohol or even certain legal medications. These substances inhibit recovery from trauma and should be avoided. The mainstay of trauma treatment is trauma informed psychotherapy, designed to help process thoughts and feelings around painful events.

## What is trauma-informed care?

Trauma-informed care involves realizing the impact of trauma, recognizing the symptoms of trauma, responding to the patient's needs and resisting re-traumatizing individuals. Asking questions, having a support person advocate for you, and communicating with your medical team may reduce some of the stresses of childbirth.