

Trauma

This sheet is about exposure to trauma in pregnancy and while breastfeeding. This information should not take the place of medical care and advice from your healthcare provider.

What is trauma?

Trauma can include damage to both your body and/or your mind. Trauma can be caused by sudden physical injury, such as being in a major car accident, taking a bad fall, being burned, or being a victim of violence or from mental/emotional stress. Pregnancy outcomes may be different based on the type of trauma experienced and the severity of the trauma. For a discussion of the mental/emotional side of trauma, see our fact sheet on Stress during Pregnancy at <https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/stress-pregnancy/>.

I have experienced trauma. Can it make it harder for me to get pregnant?

It is not known if experiencing trauma can make it harder to get pregnant.

Does experiencing trauma increase the chance for miscarriage?

Miscarriage can occur in any pregnancy. Miscarriage or late pregnancy loss can happen with some types of trauma, especially those that affect the placenta (an organ that develops in the uterus during pregnancy that provides oxygen and nutrients to the growing baby) or the uterus.

Does experiencing trauma increase the chance of birth defects?

Every pregnancy starts with a 3-5% chance of having a birth defect. This is called the background risk. While there are individual reports of babies born with and without birth defects following trauma, it is unclear if trauma increases the chance for birth defects above the background risk. One study of 62 people who were hospitalized for car accidents in the first trimester of pregnancy did not find a higher chance for birth defects than in the general population.

Does experiencing trauma in pregnancy increase the chance of other pregnancy-related problems?

Among people who were pregnant and experienced domestic violence, studies have found an increased chance for preterm delivery (birth before week 37) and low birth weight (weighing less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces [2500 grams] at birth).

Another concern with trauma is for placental abruption, which can occur with trauma to the abdomen such as in domestic violence or car accidents. Placental abruption is a serious condition in which the placenta pulls away from the uterus. This is thought to be a leading cause of pregnancy loss and stillbirth after trauma in the second and third trimester of pregnancy.

People who experience trauma in pregnancy are also at increased risk to develop post-traumatic stress disorder.

Does experiencing trauma in pregnancy affect future behavior or learning for the child?

It is not known if trauma increases the chance for behavior or learning issues for the child.

What should I do if I experience trauma during pregnancy?

You should call 911 or go to an emergency room for treatment of serious physical trauma (bodily injuries). Healthcare providers can treat injuries and can check the pregnancy by drawing blood, performing an ultrasound, performing diagnostic imaging, monitoring the baby's heart rate, and checking for uterine contractions. Continue to follow up for monitoring with your healthcare provider.

If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic or interpersonal violence, please call the National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-7233 (SAFE).

Breastfeeding after a traumatic experience:

Weighing the benefits and risks of breastfeeding following a recent or past traumatic experience can be important. In

order to make the best decision for you and your baby, speak with your healthcare provider about your options. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all of your breastfeeding questions.

If a male experiences trauma, could it affect fertility (ability to get partner pregnant) or increase the chance of birth defects?

Studies have not been done to see if trauma could affect male fertility or increase the chance of birth defects. Trauma that injures the scrotum or testicles (organs involved in making sperm) could affect the ability to conceive a pregnancy. In general, exposures that fathers or sperm donors have are unlikely to increase the risks to a pregnancy. For more information, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet Paternal Exposures at <https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/>.

Please click here to view references.

Questions? Call 866.626.6847 | Text 855.999.3525 | Email or Chat at [MotherToBaby.org](https://mothertobaby.org).

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