

Birth without Fear

Specialist Perinatal Service



Birth without Fear

What is fear of childbirth?

Fear or anxiety about childbirth can be common, however up to 14% of women/ birthing people may experience this fear as severe, experiencing high levels of anxiety or distress.

Fear of childbirth can happen whether this is your first pregnancy, or you have had a baby before. In this second situation, this can be because of a previous traumatic experience of childbirth.

How might I feel?

- Distress and heightened anxiety when a pregnancy is confirmed
- Feelings of being out of control and trapped, agitation, irritability, stress, restlessness and nervousness
- Feelings of isolation, loneliness, being misunderstood and unsupported
- Negative thoughts about being abnormal and different to the people around you, especially those who are pregnant
- Thoughts about having an abortion, even though you want to have children
- Self-doubt about your ability to go through labour and birth
- Repeated negative thoughts around labour and birth
- Intrusive thoughts and memories (sometimes images) of a previous traumatic birth
- Fear of pain during labour and birth
- Fear of harm or death as a result of birth (in relation to both mother and baby)
- Increasing distress and anxiety throughout the pregnancy and especially in the last trimester (last 3 months)
- Symptoms of anxiety, which can include: altered sleep pattern, nightmares, rapid heartbeat, tension, abdominal pains, difficulty relaxing, and panic symptoms
- Avoidance of talking about/thinking about birth
- Avoidance of antenatal education

How can I help myself?

The earlier you can get help the better:

- Speak to someone you trust if you feel comfortable doing so.
- Speak to your Consultant Obstetrician (pregnancy doctor) and/or midwife
- Read relevant sources of information – don't rely on information from blogs or internet forums.
- Develop a detailed birth plan in partnership with your birth partner and midwife.
- Take care of yourself with a balanced diet, exercise, relaxation.
- Consider yoga and mindfulness.
- It can be difficult to imagine or hold your baby in mind when you are feeling very anxious about childbirth. Using an app such as Baby Buddy (<https://www.bestbeginnings.org.uk/baby-buddy>) can offer regular information about how your baby is growing and developing and help you to start to form a bond with them.



Help and Support

How can we help you prepare for birth?

- You may be initially offered an appointment with a specialist mental health midwife or consultant obstetrician to discuss your concerns.
- You may benefit from psychological therapy and can talk to your healthcare professional about where to access further support, or there are some useful links on the back of this leaflet.
- You may find it helpful to visit to the labour ward or birth centre so that you can become familiar with the environment.
- You may be offered an appointment with an anaesthetist to discuss pain relief options, if this is a particular area of concern.

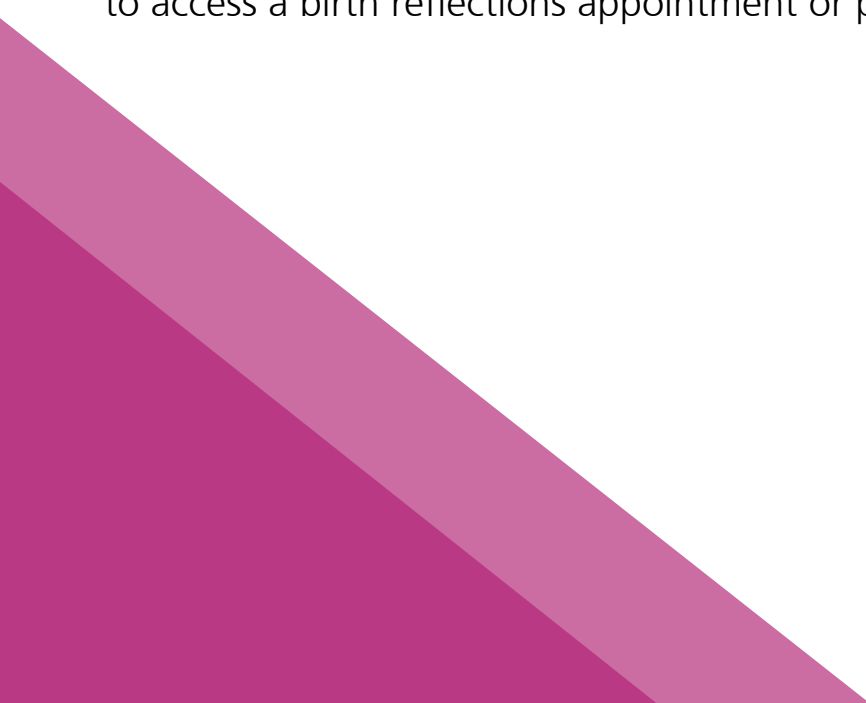
Can I request a caesarean birth?

If you feel strongly that a caesarean birth would be the best option for you, let your midwife or obstetrician know this as soon as possible.

They will offer you an appointment with a consultant obstetrician to discuss your birth options and make a plan that is best for you.

What about after the birth?

You can discuss your experience of the birth with a health professional such as your midwife, health visitor or GP. If you need further support, you may be able to access a birth reflections appointment or psychological therapy.



Resources

NICE CG192 Guideline for Antenatal and Postnatal Mental Health

NICE CG132 Guideline for Caesarean Section

NICE QS115 Quality Standard for Antenatal and Postnatal Mental Health

NICE QS32 Quality Standard for Caesarean Section

RCOG leaflet 'Choosing to have a caesarean section'

www.rcog.org.uk/en/patients/patient-leaflets/choosing-to-have-a-caesarean-section/

Your Rights in Childbirth **www.birthrights.org.uk/**

Making birth better **www.makebirthbetter.org/**

General information around birth choices

www.mybirthmychoice.co.uk/

Birth Trauma Association **www.birthtraumaassociation.org.uk/**

Birth Trauma Association page for Fathers/Partners

www.birthtraumaassociation.org.uk/help-support/fathers-partners-page

Birth trauma Facebook page closed group **www.facebook.com/groups/TheB-TA/**

Birth Trauma and PTSD information and support **www.unfoldyourwings.co.uk/**

Maternity Experience **www.matexp.org.uk/**

NHS Choices PTSD information **www.nhs.uk/conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/**

PTSD UK **www.ptsduk.org/**

EMDR support and Information **emdrassociation.uk/**

Baby Buddy app **www.bestbeginnings.org.uk/baby-buddy**

Stillbirth and Neonatal Death (SANDS) **www.uk-sands.org**

Your Baby and You, helping you find your way with your little one **www.penninecare.nhs.uk/your-baby-and-you**



To get involved with GMMH and/or share your views, please scan the QR code or visit:

**[www.gmmh.nhs.uk/
get-involved](http://www.gmmh.nhs.uk/get-involved)**

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