

Symptoms of Traumatic Stress

(check all that apply)

Reexperiencing

Nightmares

Disturbing dreams about your baby's birth or medical treatment in the hospital

Flashbacks

The traumatic experience is replayed in your mind, like a recording of what happened, which may include visual images, sounds, smells, physical feelings, strong emotions. Flashbacks are likely to occur when something happens that reminds you of the trauma, or they can occur spontaneously, like when you are falling asleep or trying to relax.

Intrusive thoughts

Thoughts that pop into your head uncontrollably and for no particular reason, and are difficult to block out, which can cause you to feel stressed

Emotional distress from trauma reminders

Experiencing strong negative emotions when reminded of the traumatic event

Physical reactivity from trauma reminders

Experiencing physical symptoms (such as pounding heart, rapid breathing, sweating) upon being reminded of the traumatic event

The first set of experiences of traumatic stress are ones of reexperiencing the trauma. The reexperiencing may take the form of nightmares or flashbacks.

Professionals believe these occur because the mind is trying to make sense of frightening memories or gain some control over them.

Reexperiencing the trauma of hearing bad news about your baby's medical condition, or of witnessing your baby having painful procedures, may result in several common symptoms.

If you are having upsetting dreams or intrusive thoughts and feelings, you are not alone; these are common for parents in your situation.

Negative thoughts and feelings

Negative feelings

Emotions like sadness, guilt, anger

Negative thoughts

Thinking negatively about the world, others, or yourself

Self-blame

Blaming yourself for what happened

Difficulty experiencing positive emotions

- Finding it hard to experience joy
- Struggling to connect emotionally with your baby

Decreased interest in activities

Not doing things you used to enjoy

Difficulty recalling parts of the event

Having difficulty remembering details from the event, such as the birth or your baby's admission to the NICU

Arousal and reactivity

- Startle response**
Being easily startled by unexpected noises, such as the sound of the baby monitors, your phone ringing, or loud sounds from the street
- Hypervigilance**
Always being on guard, alert, looking for threat
- Risky or destructive behavior**
Doing things that are dangerous, like driving very **fast** or **drinking excessively**
- Irritability**
Feeling easily annoyed or irritated
- Difficulty concentrating**
Having difficulty concentrating on tasks
- Difficulty sleeping**
Having difficulty falling or staying asleep

Another type of common reaction to traumatic stress is becoming very easily startled by unexpected noises, such as the sound of the baby monitors or loud sounds from the street.

A natural reaction to the intrusive memories and strong emotional reactions is the urge to push these thoughts and feelings away.

This natural tendency leads to a group of traumatic stress symptoms that mothers commonly experience, such as avoiding situations that remind them of the traumatic experience, including their baby's medical experiences.

Avoidance

- External**
Avoiding things that remind you of the traumatic experience:
 - Avoid visiting or calling the hospital
 - Avoid doctors and nursery staff
 - Avoid asking questions about your baby
 - Avoid touching or caring for your baby
- Internal**
Avoiding thoughts and feelings that remind you of the experience:
 - Avoid thinking about your baby
 - Avoid thinking about your experience