

Understanding and Managing Birth Injuries: Support and Guidance for Parents



Highlights

Birth injuries can include bruising, swelling, bone fractures, or nerve injuries.

Birth injuries are usually temporary, but some may require treatment or have long-term effects.

Support is available for parents dealing with birth injuries.

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What is a Birth Injury?

A birth injury, also known as neonatal birth trauma, refers to injuries such as

bruising, nerve damage, or broken bones that occur during childbirth. While birth injuries are common, most are temporary and heal on their own.

About 1 in 200 babies born in hospitals experience a birth injury.

Causes of Birth Injury

Fetal distress (lack of oxygen during labor)
Use of vacuum or forceps during assisted births
Malpresentation of the baby during birth
Shoulder dystocia (baby's shoulder gets stuck in the pelvis)
Large baby size

Birth injuries are never caused by anything the mother did or didn't do.

Types of Birth Injuries

Bruises and Swelling of the Scalp

Common injuries include swelling of the scalp from traveling through the birth canal or vacuum-assisted delivery. Swelling usually disappears within a few days.

Fractures

Fractures, especially of the collarbone or upper arm, can occur during difficult births. Most fractures are caused by shoulder dystocia, especially with large babies.

Nerve Damage

Nerve damage can occur, such as facial nerve injury from forceps or brachial plexus injury causing arm weakness or paralysis (e.g., Erb's palsy). Nerve damage is often temporary and monitored in hospital.

Brain Injury

In rare cases, insufficient oxygen during labor can cause brain injury (e.g.,

hypoxic-ischemic encephalopathy\). Cerebral palsy may result from birth complications, though most cases are not birth-related.

Brain Bleeds

Bleeding in the brain may occur, especially in premature babies. Symptoms may include paleness, limpness, or seizures.

Treatment of Birth Injury in Babies

Most birth injuries are temporary and may require no treatment.

Fractures may need imaging and immobilization.

Nerve damage may require physiotherapy, and further treatment may be necessary if recovery is slow.

Prevention of Birth Injuries

To reduce the risk, pregnant women should maintain pelvic floor exercises, get regular check-ups, and work with an experienced medical team during pregnancy and labor. Birth injuries are not caused by the actions of the mother.

Psychological Wellbeing of Parents

Watching a baby recover from birth injury can be distressing. Birth trauma may be emotional or psychological, potentially leading to postnatal depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress disorder. It's important to seek support from healthcare providers if birth trauma symptoms appear.

Tools and Assistance

Support for Parents

Healthcare Providers: Reach out to your doctor, midwife, or pediatrician for professional advice and emotional support.

Support Groups: Connect with local groups or organizations to share experiences and gain support from other parents.

Resources for Managing Birth Injuries

Parenting Guides: Access resources that help explain birth injuries and how to care for a baby recovering from one.

Pediatric Physiotherapy: For nerve damage or fractures, physiotherapy can aid recovery through specialized exercises.

Mental Health Services: Seek counseling for post-traumatic stress or anxiety if needed.

Prevention Strategies

Prenatal Care: Regular check-ups and a healthy lifestyle can reduce the risk of birth injuries.

Pelvic Floor Exercises: Strengthen pelvic muscles to help prevent complications during labor.

Communication with Healthcare Providers

Birth Plan: Discuss your preferences with your doctor or midwife ahead of labor to reduce stress and complications.

Reporting Concerns: If you're unhappy with your care, ask about formal complaint procedures.