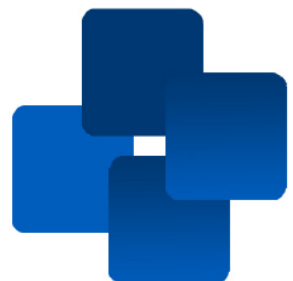


Patient Information

Tokophobia

(Fear of Childbirth)

Women's Services



What is Tokophobia?

Tokophobia is a severe fear (phobia) of childbirth. This fear of childbirth can happen even if a woman really wants a baby. For some women this may also impact on their feelings towards their pregnancy.

It is not uncommon to experience some uncertainty or anxiety about giving birth. More severe fear of childbirth (tokophobia) may affect up to 14% of women¹.

Primary tokophobia refers to women who have had no previous experience of birth but who nevertheless have a strong fear of childbirth. In these cases, the feelings of dread associated with childbirth may link to experiences as far back as childhood.

Secondary tokophobia is considered to be a form of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It is the most common form of tokophobia and occurs in women who have had a previous traumatic experience of childbirth.

Many women want a normal birth but many have fears around achieving this safely.

Why might I have a fear of childbirth?

A fear of childbirth could be due to one or more of the following:

- A fear of pain.
- A previous birth that you experienced as traumatic.
- A previous traumatic medical experience.
- Previous traumatic events, such as an experience of sexual assault or rape, history of childhood abuse.
- A lack of support during pregnancy and birth, and lack of information.
- A history of mood disorders, anxiety disorders (including PTSD).
- A strong need to be in control.
- Hearing, reading or witnessing negative experiences of childbirth.

How we can support you

Between the consultant midwives, perinatal mental health midwife and your named community midwife, we can:

- Empower you to access information and make choices around your care and birth.
- Encourage you to attend a **Birth Afterthoughts** appointment if you have had a previous traumatic maternity experience. You can self-refer by telephoning **01438 286079**.
- Offer you an appointment with the specialist mental health midwife and/or consultant midwife to discuss your concerns and help put a personalised care and support plan in place.
- Refer you to the Community Perinatal Mental Health team (particularly if this is your first pregnancy), or Wellbeing team for CBT/counselling.
- Arrange for you to visit the Lister hospital Diamond Jubilee Maternity Unit in order for you to become familiar with the environment.
- Offer you enhanced antenatal and postnatal care where you build relationships with the professionals looking after you.
- Offer you support when you attend the unit for any antenatal appointments and/or when you are in labour.
- Offer you a birth debrief prior to being either discharged from the maternity unit or prior to discharge from postnatal community care.

How you can help yourself

- Speak to your partner and family/friends if you feel comfortable doing so.
- Speak to your consultant obstetrician and/or midwife and ask what options and services are available for women with tokophobia.
- Ask about the availability of continuity of carer where you see the same midwives throughout pregnancy.
- Learn relaxation techniques, such as yoga, mindfulness and hypnobirthing*.
- Consider Birth Trauma Resolution Therapy*

* Hypnobirthing classes and Birth Trauma Resolution Therapy are payable enhanced maternity services that can be provided in addition to NHS services offered.

Useful contact details

Antenatal Clinic, Lister Hospital	☎ 01438 314333 ext.4070
Antenatal Appointments	☎ 01438 286031
Consultant Led Unit, Lister Hospital	☎ 01438 284124 (24 hours)
Midwifery Led Unit, Lister Hospital	☎ 01438 286197 (24 hours)
Birth Afterthoughts Appointments	☎ 01438 286079

Useful websites for more information

- **NHS website** - www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/
- **Positive Birth Movement** - <https://www.positivebirthmovement.org/>
A network of support groups and resources.
- **Birth Trauma Association** - <https://birthtraumaassociation.org.uk/>
A charity that supports women who suffer birth trauma.
- **Hertfordshire Private Healthcare - Enhanced Maternity Services**
<https://www.hertfordshireprivatehealthcare.co.uk/treatment-and-services/enhanced-maternity-services/>

Further reading

There are other maternity information leaflets you may wish to read. These are available on our East & North Herts NHS Trust website: www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk/patient-information/

Reference

¹O'Connell, M.,A., Leahy-Warren, P., Khashan, A.S., Kenny, L.C. and O'Neill, S.,M., 2017. Worldwide prevalence of tocophobia in pregnant women: systematic review and meta-analysis. *Acta Obstetrica et Gynecologica Scandinavica; Acta Obstet Gynecol Scand*, [e-journal] 96 (8), pp.907-920./aogs.13138.

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