

Submission  
No 488

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

I had my first baby at [REDACTED] in Mid-2021, aged 34. My birth story feels like two halves - great at home, bad in the hospital.

My partner and I were proactive in educating ourselves in birth prep - attended the hospital course; She Births course; saw a women's health physio and hired a doula.

A few days before my due date (during covid lockdown), the public hospital announced they would only allow one support person at birth - so my doula would be unable to attend. On the day I went into labour, I still felt relaxed and empowered, despite knowing it would be just me and partner.

I laboured at home, with my partner (and the doula offering support on the phone) until contractions ramped up. Headed to [REDACTED], allocated a midwife and who told me I'd arrived fully dilated. I think getting to full dilation at home was due to feeling relaxed, safe and educated about what was happening.

At the hospital, my positive experience decreased rapidly. The midwife seemed vacant and not an active provider of care.

I told her I felt the need to push. She gave me gas and air (fine) but after a while, said 'oh, you shouldn't be having that if you feel the need to push'. Frustrating that she hadn't listened to me multiple times.

Then, she told me to lie on my back with my feet in stirrups. Me and my partner questioned and said all fours or upright was preferred but she insisted and told me it was essential to do that to push the baby out. She then got my partner to hold one leg, while she held the other, and told me to push, but she kept dropping my leg when I did push against them. Felt like wasted energy.

I asked once again to push on all fours, but was told 'I was not an efficient pusher in that position'. This both confused me (as we'd learnt to work with, not against, gravity and I also felt most comfortable in that position) and also had me question my ability (at such a pivotal moment).

After pushing for 2hrs, another midwife came in and asked why I was pushing with knees spread out, as it narrows the birth canal. She noticed I was tall and told me to push with knees in, to widen the birth canal. So frustrating, more wasted energy.

More midwives came in, random ones to 'offer support' but it felt chaotic. In my birth plan, I'd asked for a quiet environment / not heaps of people present as I have social anxiety. I closed my eyes and zoned out, feeling overwhelmed.

Dr came in and said we need to use the vacuum. It didn't work, so they went to use forceps after an episiotomy. Got the baby out. I'd been pushing for 2hr 40 mins, but more than half of that time felt wasted and confusing.

Got in the shower post-birth and the midwife told me I'd need to underdress myself. My body was still shaking, and I remember trying hard not to fall over with shaky legs as I took off the delivery undies. She left me there, telling me after that she'd forgotten to bring me a towel.

I did not feel empowered during the hospital experience and felt constantly dismissed.

My pelvic floor has suffered greatly long term. My baby had head and neck tightness for the first 3 months of life, which also meant he did not tolerate the car or pram, so I was stuck at home unless I carried him, which caused vaginal heaviness / prolapse sensations. This was tough as a new mum (isolated in lockdown) unable to go for a walk outside with the baby for better mental health.

Long-term, I've been unable to do any group yoga or pilates classes due to sound incontinence. I relied heavily on yoga and pilates pre-birth for mental wellbeing, and not being able to exercise postpartum has impacted my mental health.

We have spent \$1000s on women's health physio appointments and mental health support for me and osteopathy for my baby. This has caused financial stress, due to being on a single salary. I've not been able to afford to have as many appointments as I feel I needed to recover.

Please support women's health via funding. Women aren't earning money early post-partum, and the appointments are so expensive for something so vital.