

CARING FOR YOURSELF POSTPARTUM - POST DELIVERY CHANGES

IMMEDIATE POSTPARTUM - BEFORE YOU LEAVE THE HOSPITAL

LOCHIA (VAGINAL FLOW)

Your vaginal flow will be very heavy at first, and then it will begin to slow down. A few small dime-sized clots are normal. Notify your nurse if you have any clots that are plum-sized or larger.

PAIN

You may experience discomfort after delivery related to stitches, bottom repairs, general fatigue and aches from pushing. You may also experience uterine cramping. Be sure to let your nurse know if you need any medication or an ice pack to assist with discomfort.

UTERUS

Your uterus will remain at approximately 5 months pregnant size immediately following delivery. Your nurse will frequently massage the uterus to make sure it remains firm. The uterus will shrink back to pre-pregnant size over the course of the next 4-6 weeks.

SWELLING

You may notice your swelling gets worse after delivery, especially if you received IV fluids. This is normal and will decrease over the course of the next few weeks.

Refer to teaching booklet: "The Joy of Parenthood."

Call your healthcare provider if:

1. Temperature elevated greater than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit.
2. Passing frequent clots (50 cent-sized or larger) and/or saturating one or more vaginal pads in an hour.
3. Experiencing painful reddened areas or pain in the legs with walking (could be a sign of phlebitis or blood clots).
4. Experiencing painful reddened breasts (could be a sign of mastitis if accompanied by a fever and/or flu-like symptoms).
5. Drainage, swelling, extreme warmth and/or redness at the incision site.
6. Foul-smelling discharge.

7. Inadequate pain relief.
8. Experiencing symptoms of urinary tract infection (frequent, burning or urgency of urination).
9. Experiencing postpartum blues or depression (crying frequently, sad thoughts of harming baby or self).

AFTER YOU GO HOME

FATIGUE

After going home, you will experience muscle aches and fatigue like you've never known! Try to sleep when your baby sleeps and accept or ask for any help you need during this transition period. Allow friends or family to cook, do laundry, clean or do other helpful chores. It is a nice treat for you and the baby if your partner is able to take paternity leave at this time.

LOCHIA (vaginal flow)

Always use pads, not tampons! Change your pad frequently and use your spray bottle for gentle cleaning of your bottom. You may notice an increase in flow if you are more active or are under stress. Take this time to rest and put your feet up. It is normal to see occasional quarter-sized clots and stringy mucous. Always wipe from front to back. Your lochia color will change from bright red to a pink-tinged flow and may last 2-6 weeks. If your flow suddenly becomes heavy and you are filling a pad in one hour's time or less, you pass any plum-sized clots or larger or if you experience a foul vaginal discharge odor, contact your health care provider immediately.

EPISIOTOMY

Use your pain medicines and ice packs to help with discomfort. Use your peri bottle, Tucks pads, tub baths and sprays. Episiotomies usually take 4 weeks or more to heal.

ABDOMINAL STITCHES

If you have staples, they should be removed prior to discharge from the hospital. Leave steri-strips in place for 7-10 days after which you may remove them. Watch closely for signs of infection, such as redness, oozing, swelling or foul odor. You can shower each day if you wish.

UTERINE CRAMPING

With each baby you deliver, your cramping may be worse. Uterine cramps are also stimulated by breastfeeding, so be sure to use pain medications as needed for comfort.

BREASTS

Your breasts will fill 3-5 days following delivery. Use nursing pads for leaking whether or not you are breastfeeding. Engorgement will diminish within 10-14 days after delivery. If you experience sore nipples with breastfeeding, use Pure-Lan or Lansinoh for comfort. This product is safe for baby and does not need to be removed prior to feeding. Wear a good bra for support. Contact the hospital's lactation consultant with any other concerns related to nursing your infant.

HAIR LOSS

You may notice in the weeks following delivery that you are losing large amounts of hair. This is normal and is related to the hormone shift occurring within your body. Your hair will soon return to its normal growth cycle.

VARICOSE VEINS

You may have developed varicose veins during pregnancy. If so, utilize elastic support hose when walking or standing in the first 6 weeks following delivery.

HEMORRHOIDS & BOWELS

Be sure to drink plenty of fluid and increase your fiber intake to help with bowel elimination. If necessary, use over-the-counter stool softeners. It may take several days after delivery to have a bowel movement. Treat hemorrhoids with cold compresses, topical ointments and pain medications if needed. Talk to your health care provider if constipation is a concern.

MENSTRUATION

If breastfeeding, it may be several months before you have a menstrual cycle. **DO NOT** use breastfeeding as birth control. If you are bottle-feeding, you may begin menstruating 4-6 weeks following delivery. Remember, conception is possible before your period occurs.

INTERCOURSE AND THE BIRTH CANAL

The vagina, which has stretched to accommodate delivery, gradually returns to its previous condition in the 3-7 weeks following your baby's birth. Refrain from intercourse until after your flow has stopped. Remember, your comfort level determines the timing. Breastfeeding mothers may experience vaginal dryness for which lubricating jelly can be used. Keep in mind, you can conceive any time prior to having your first period following delivery. Discuss family planning methods with your healthcare provider if that is an option for you.

EMOTIONAL CHANGES

As a new mother, you will feel joy, fear, confusion, exhaustion and love. The arrival of a new baby is like no other experience in life. In the first 1-4 days after delivery you may experience sudden tears, impatience or irritability, restlessness, anxiety and mood swings. These feelings are caused by the hormonal shift that occurs after giving birth. It usually takes 2-3 months to establish a routine with your newborn and it is normal to feel a bit overwhelmed at this time.

POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION

PPD affects 1 in 10 women and may be due to hormones or environmental factors. Characteristics include: uncontrollable crying, lack of interest in baby, fear of harming baby, fear of harming self, lack of concentration, appetite and sleep disturbances, exaggerated highs and lows, memory loss, insomnia, guilt, fatigue, sadness and confusion. If you or a loved one experience these changes, it is important to contact a health care provider immediately. Treatment may include medication, counseling or a combination of both. It is important to realize that these symptoms are not a sign of weakness or inadequacy.

THE NEW FATHER

Becoming a new dad is exciting! Sometimes, however, fathers may experience feelings of neglect or loneliness upon the arrival of the new baby. It may seem that all the attention is focused on the mother and baby. Remember to share your feelings and communicate. It is important to plan time together as a couple and family. Healthy adult relationships are important to baby's emotional well-being as well as your own. After you leave the hospital, please do not hesitate to contact your health care provider if you have any questions or concerns. Awareness of your own physical and emotional well-being can be very helpful at this special time of your life.