

Taking Care of Yourself after Childbirth

Having a baby can be one of life's greatest joys. Yet, you may feel discomfort as your body recovers. Know what changes to expect and remember to take care of yourself after giving birth.



Physical Changes

• Sore Breasts (0 – 5 days after birth)

Your breasts may get very full and sore as your body makes milk. Breastfeeding often can help prevent this.

Talk to your doctor or a breastfeeding counselor if you have any questions.

• Stitches (0 – 3 weeks after birth)

If you have stitches on your belly or vaginal area, the threads will dissolve. If you had a C-section and have staples, the doctor will remove the staples before you go home or soon thereafter.

! If your wound smells foul or bleeds, see your doctor.

• Cramps (0 – 6 weeks after birth)

You may have period-like cramps as your uterus shrinks back to its normal size. You may also cramp while breastfeeding.

• Vaginal Discharge (0–6 weeks after birth)

By the end of the first week, discharge will change from bright red to a brownish color. By the end of the second week, it will change to a whitish color. The white discharge may continue for up to 6 weeks. It should smell fleshy, but not foul.

! If the discharge becomes heavy and bright red again after it has lightened, see your doctor.



The “Baby Blues”

Having a new baby can be overwhelming. You may feel sad or anxious, lose your appetite, or cry often after childbirth.

This is normal and will go away soon. Don't keep it to yourself. Seek support from your loved ones or a counselor.

! If you feel extremely sad and unable to care for yourself or your baby, talk to your doctor right away. This may be a serious health issue called postpartum depression.

What to Avoid

• Physical Activity (0 – 6 weeks after birth)

Do not exercise or lift anything heavier than your baby until after your six-week checkup. Try to rest and nap when you can. You can slowly increase your activity level over time.

• Sex (0 – 6 weeks after birth)

Avoid having sex to prevent infection and injury to healing areas.

• Baths (0 – 6 weeks after birth)

Take showers or sponge baths instead. If you have vaginal stitches, rinse and clean the area with antiseptic spray after each bathroom use. To relieve soreness and promote healing, take a sitz bath: fill a basin a few inches deep with warm water. Sit in the basin and let your wound soak for 15 – 20 minutes.

What to Keep in Mind

• Diet

Have a balanced diet (such as chicken, rice, and vegetables). Eat foods that are high in fiber, such as apples, raisins, bran cereals, and vegetables to prevent constipation. If you are breastfeeding, drink at least 6 – 8 glasses of fluids every day. Try unsweetened fruit juices, low-fat milk, water, or soup.

• Family Planning

If you are not breastfeeding, your period may return in 6 – 10 weeks. If you are breastfeeding, it may be delayed.

! You can still get pregnant even if your period has not returned. If you are not planning to get pregnant, use birth control. Speak with your doctor or a family planning educator to choose the right method for you.

Follow-Up with Your Doctor

Within 3 – 5 days of birth

Schedule an appointment with a pediatrician for your newborn baby.

Within 6 weeks of birth

If you had a C-section, return to your OB/GYN for a checkup in 1 – 2 weeks. If you had a vaginal birth, return in 4 – 6 weeks. Your OB/GYN may also recommend a checkup sooner if there are any other issues.

Every pregnancy and birth is different. Talk to your health care provider for any specific concerns and questions.

