



## What to Expect after Delivery: The First Week

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### Physical Recovery

- Most people leave the hospital 24-36 hours after an uncomplicated vaginal delivery. A C-section or complicated delivery may take longer to heal so you may stay in the hospital longer.
- You will probably have some cramping as the uterus contracts back down for 2-3 days after delivery. This pain is usually worse during breastfeeding. Body aches (sore arms, neck, jaw, and back) are normal and will go away in a few days. These "after-birth pains" are often mild after your first delivery and worse after additional deliveries (ie. after your second or third child).
- If you had a tear or an episiotomy you will likely experience a burning/stinging pain for the first week and then an ache that lasts for a couple of weeks. Keep the area clean and dry. Use the Peri bottle supplied by the hospital each time you urinate. Padsicles, witch hazel and sitz baths are options to try for relief.
- Most people benefit from taking Tylenol 1g every 6 hours and Advil 400mg every 6 hours for the first week after delivery.
- Postpartum bleeding is normal for 6 weeks after delivery. It will start off heavy with some small clots and lighten over time. Use menstrual pads for hygiene; do not use tampons. Please call our office or go to Emerg if, once you get home, your bleeding fills a menstrual pad in one hour, you change the pad, and then you fill a second pad in another one hour.
- Incontinence is common the first few days after delivery, especially after a long labour or an assisted birth. If you experience incontinence, avoid lifting heavy objects, drink 6-8 glasses of fluid/day, and learn about pelvic floor exercises. Work towards regular, soft bowel movements by eating plenty of fiber-containing foods and keeping up on your fluids. You may need laxatives if you are having difficulty passing stool. Hemorrhoids are common postpartum and will also benefit from soft stool.
- Hot flashes, especially at night, are common. They are related to hormonal changes and can last a few weeks. Please tell your doctor if you have a fever, as this could be a sign of an infection.
- Swelling is also common postpartum, usually worse after a c-section. Keep drinking fluids and keep your legs elevated when possible. If one calf is more swollen or painful than the other please seek medical attention.

### Mental Health

- It is normal to feel emotional after giving birth. Hormonal changes and fatigue all contribute.
- "Baby Blues" is a term that is sometimes used to describe the sadness and tearfulness that can occur after having a baby. It usually lasts less than 2 weeks. Discuss your feelings with your family members and health care team. Try to get rest when you are able; let your partner or family help you.
- If you are feeling severe mood swings, overwhelming fatigue, lack of joy, and/ or loss of appetite you may be experiencing postpartum depression. Please discuss what you're feeling with your healthcare team.
- Seek help immediately if you have trouble caring for yourself or your newborn or if you are having thoughts of harming yourself or your baby.

## **Breast Care**

- Your breasts will likely become tender and swollen 3-5 days after giving birth. Supportive bras, like a sports bra, will help. Continue taking Tylenol and Advil regularly for pain relief.
- If you are breastfeeding, feed your baby on a regular schedule to help relieve the pressure of engorgement. You can use heat and massage before and during feeds to help the breasts to drain easier.
- If you are not breastfeeding, avoid stimulating your breasts. You can use cold compresses or cabbage leaves to help with discomfort from engorgement. Some people may need to remove a small amount of milk from their breasts for comfort.
- Speak to your care team if you notice an area of your breast becoming red, hot, swollen, and painful.

### **References**

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