

Additional Resources

Mayo Clinic

Postpartum Care: What to Expect After a Vaginal Birth
www.mayoclinic.org

Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses

*Patient Education: Postpartum Changes
and Postpartum Self Care*
www.awhonn.org

American Pregnancy Association

www.americanpregnancy.org

Postpartum Support International

www.postpartum.net

The information provided in this brochure is not medical advice. You should seek IMMEDIATE medical attention by calling your health care provider or going to an emergency room if you experience any of the signs described.



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A stylized illustration of several flowers on thin green stems. The flowers are in various colors: a large pink one at the top, a large light pink one in the middle, and several smaller ones in shades of green and yellow. The background is a light yellow gradient.

Taking Care of Yourself After Giving Birth

Giving birth is very hard work and takes a toll on your body. You will need time and rest to be yourself again. This brochure explains physical and emotional changes that may happen after you give birth.

Physical and emotional changes you may experience after delivery:

Bleeding from your vagina will be bright red, like a period. Over a few days, the blood will lessen and fade to brown then pink, finally becoming clear in about 4 to 6 weeks. If bleeding continues to be heavy (filling more than one sanitary pad in 1 hour), turns bright red, contains clots bigger than a quarter, or produces a foul odor, then you need to call a doctor or go to the emergency room. This could be a sign of infection or that the placenta was not fully discharged.

When you go to the bathroom, it may sting when your urine comes out or it may come out in small trickles until you regain full bladder control. It is important to urinate at least once every 6 hours. When your bladder is empty, your uterus (womb) can return to its normal position in your body. If you have difficulty urinating, experience pain or burning when urinating, or feel a need to urinate often but only a small amount comes out, then you need to drink more fluids and notify a doctor. You could have a urinary tract infection.

Some women have cramps after the birth. These "afterpains" can last 2-5 days and mean that your uterus is contracting normally.

About 5 days after giving birth, if you have pain in your lower abdomen, then you need to call a health care provider. This could be a sign that you did not completely discharge the placenta.

It is normal to have a temperature between 97 to 100 degrees Fahrenheit. At any time following delivery, if your temperature goes over 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit, then call a health care provider. This could be a sign of infection.

Severe headache, blurred vision, or swelling of the face, ankles, or fingers could be a sign of toxemia or pre-eclampsia. Go to the emergency room to see a doctor.

Sharp pain in your chest, shortness of breath, concentrated pain, or redness/swelling in your thigh or calf might indicate a blood clot. Call a doctor. If you are unable to reach a doctor, have someone take you to the emergency room or call 911 for an ambulance.

Your breasts will stop producing milk about 7-10 days after you give birth. Using cold compresses, wearing a supportive bra 24 hours/day, not touching the breasts, and taking a pain reliever, such as ibuprofen, may help with the discomfort.

If you have pain, swelling, tenderness, redness, heat, or a lump in your breast, you may have an infection called "mastitis." Call a doctor as soon as possible to get treatment before the infection gets worse.

You may feel hemorrhoids on your bottom and may have itching, bleeding, or pain while having a bowel movement. Hemorrhoids are common during pregnancy. The strain of pushing during birth may cause more swelling. These hemorrhoids are usually most painful the first few days after giving birth. There are several ways you can make yourself more comfortable:

- Use a donut-shaped pillow to sit on,
- Sit in a few inches of cool water in a clean bathtub,
- Use Tucks pads,
- Drink 8 glasses of water a day, and
- Eat foods containing fiber, such as whole grain products, raw fruits, and vegetables, and avoid sweets and cheese.

Many women experience changes in their moods following childbirth. You may feel happy one moment and weepy the next. If these moods last more than 2 weeks and you feel depressed most of the time, have thoughts of harming yourself, or are unable to cope with everyday stresses, you should talk to a health care professional immediately. You may have postpartum depression, which can be treated.