



Postpartum care *for mother*

Postpartum Maternal Handout

Page your midwife right away if:

- You are filling a large pad in one hour or you pass a clot larger than your fist
- There is a strong, foul odour with your bleeding
- Your perineum or incision suddenly begins to bleed or ooze, feels hot, goes red, or becomes a lot more tender to the touch
- You develop a fever over 38°C
- You have thoughts of harming yourself or your baby, or you are feeling like you just can't cope.

Rest and recovery:

You have just been through a significant physical event and will require time to rest and recover. Allow yourself the luxury of time in bed, resting at home, and focusing on self-care. Ask for and accept help from friends and family with housework and childcare.

Bleeding:

You can expect some bleeding for up to 6 weeks. In the first 2-3 days it is normal to bleed more than a heavy period. If your bleeding becomes bright red and heavy again after having decreased, it is often a sign that you need to slow down and rest.

Afterpains:

Afterpains are felt as the uterus contracts in the first few days after birth. You may notice them more when breastfeeding. You may take acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil) every 3 hours. Do not take more than 3200 mg ibuprofen or 4000 mg Tylenol in 24 h. Your midwife can prescribe stronger medication if these are not effective.

Perineal care:

After a vaginal birth your perineum may feel sore and tender. If you have had a tear it may feel painful to sit. Spray your vulva with water while you pee to reduce stinging. Sitz baths in Epsom salts can prevent infection and speed healing. If you have had stitches, they will dissolve.



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Incision care:

After a C-section, you may have stitches which dissolve, or staples that your midwife will take out at home around day 6. If you have steri-strips, leave them in place. It is recommended that you shower instead of bathing until the skin is well closed (10-14 days).

Using the toilet:

Your bladder should function normally without pain or burning. It is important to empty your bladder regularly to minimize bleeding. It may be a few days before your first bowel movement. Try to avoid constipation by eating a healthy diet with lots of fruit, vegetables, and fluids. Stool softeners such as Colace can help make your first few bowel movements easier. Hemorrhoids can be treated with witch hazel, black tea bags, or medicated creams like Anusol.

Breast care:

Your midwife can help with cracked or damaged nipples. Pay attention to baby's position and latch with feeding. Express a couple of drops of milk onto your nipples after every feed and allow to air dry. Around day 2-4 postpartum, you may notice that your breasts feel very full. Engorgement is common and should go away after a day or two. It can be relieved by frequent feeding, cabbage leaves in your bra, warm compresses before a feed and cold compresses after. Once your milk is in, your breasts should feel full before a feed and soft afterward. They should not be sore.

Mood changes:

Many new parents experience a period of "baby blues" that lasts up to two weeks after baby is born. It is normal to feel moody, weepy, or irritable. Make sure to ask for help with baby, around the house, and in caring for yourself. Exhaustion, over-doing things, and pain can make the blues worse. For about 10 % of women, these feelings progress into postpartum depression or anxiety which needs to be addressed. Please speak to your midwife if you are having feelings that worry you.