

# Postpartum: Care Instructions

## Your Care Instructions

After childbirth (postpartum period), your body goes through many changes. Some of these changes happen over several weeks. In the hours after delivery, your body will begin to recover from childbirth while it prepares to breastfeed your newborn. You may feel emotional during this time. Your hormones can shift your mood without warning for no clear reason.

In the first couple of weeks after childbirth, many women have emotions that change from happy to sad. You may find it hard to sleep. You may cry a lot. This is called the "baby blues." These overwhelming emotions often go away within a couple of days or weeks. But it's important to discuss your feelings with your doctor.

It is easy to get too tired and overwhelmed during the first weeks after childbirth. Don't try to do too much. Get rest whenever you can, accept help from others, and eat well and drink plenty of fluids.

In the first couple of weeks after giving birth, your doctor or midwife may want to check in with you and make a plan for any follow-up care you may need. You will likely have a complete postpartum visit in the first 3 months after delivery. At that time, your doctor or midwife will check on your recovery from childbirth. He or she will also see how you are doing with your emotions and talk about your concerns or questions.

**Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety.** Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

## How can you care for yourself at home?

- Sleep or rest when your baby sleeps.
- Get help with household chores from family or friends, if you can. Do not try to do it all yourself.
- If you have hemorrhoids or swelling or pain around the opening of your vagina, try using cold and heat. You can put ice or a cold pack on the area for 10 to 20 minutes at a time. Put a thin cloth between the ice and your skin. Also try sitting in a few inches of warm water (sitz bath) 3 times a day and after bowel movements.
- Take pain medicines exactly as directed.
  - If the doctor gave you a prescription medicine for pain, take it as prescribed.
  - If you are not taking a prescription pain medicine, ask your doctor if you can take an over-the-counter medicine.
- Eat more fiber to avoid constipation. Include foods such as whole-grain breads and cereals, raw vegetables, raw and dried fruits, and beans.
- Drink plenty of fluids, enough so that your urine is light yellow or clear like water. If you have kidney, heart, or liver disease and have to limit fluids, talk with your doctor before you increase the amount of fluids you drink.
- Do not rinse inside your vagina with fluids (douche).
- If you have stitches, keep the area clean by pouring or spraying warm water over the area outside your vagina and anus after you use the toilet.
- Keep a list of questions to ask your doctor or midwife. Your questions might be about:
  - Changes in your breasts, such as lumps or soreness.
  - When to expect your menstrual period to start again.
  - What form of birth control is best for you.
  - Weight you have put on during the pregnancy.
  - Exercise options.
  - What foods and drinks are best for you, especially if you are breastfeeding.
  - Problems you might be having with breastfeeding.
  - When you can have sex. Some women may want to talk about lubricants for the vagina.
  - Any feelings of sadness or restlessness that you are having.

## When should you call for help?

**Call** anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You have thoughts of harming yourself, your baby, or another person.
- You passed out (lost consciousness).
- You have chest pain, are short of breath, or cough up blood.
- You have a seizure.

**Call your doctor now** or seek immediate medical care if:

- Your vaginal bleeding seems to be getting heavier.
- You are dizzy or lightheaded, or you feel like you may faint.
- You have a fever.
- You have new or more belly pain.
- You have symptoms of a blood clot in your leg (called a deep vein thrombosis), such as:
  - Pain in the calf, back of the knee, thigh, or groin.

- Redness and swelling in your leg or groin.
- You have signs of preeclampsia, such as:
  - Sudden swelling of your face, hands, or feet.
  - New vision problems (such as dimness, blurring, or seeing spots).
  - A severe headache.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- You have new or worse vaginal discharge.
- You feel sad or depressed.
- You are having problems with your breasts or breastfeeding.

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