

Vaginal Childbirth: Care Instructions



Your Care Instructions

Your body will slowly heal in the next few weeks. It is easy to get too tired and overwhelmed during the first weeks after your baby is born. Changes in your hormones can shift your mood without warning. You may find it hard to meet the extra demands on your energy and time. Take it easy on yourself.

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?

- Vaginal bleeding and cramps
 - After delivery, you will have a bloody discharge from the vagina. This will turn pink within a week and then white or yellow after about 10 days. It may last for 2 to 4 weeks or longer, until the uterus has healed. Use pads instead of tampons until you stop bleeding.
 - Do not worry if you pass some blood clots, as long as they are smaller than a golf ball. If you have a tear or stitches in your vaginal area, change the pad at least every 4 hours to prevent soreness and infection.
 - You may have cramps for the first few days after childbirth. These are normal and occur as the uterus shrinks to normal size. Take an over-the-counter pain medicine, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), or naproxen (Aleve), for cramps. Read and follow all instructions on the label. Do not take aspirin, because it can cause more bleeding.
 - Do not take two or more pain medicines at the same time unless the doctor told you to. Many pain medicines have acetaminophen, which is Tylenol. Too much acetaminophen (Tylenol) can be harmful.
- Stitches
 - If you have stitches, they will dissolve on their own and do not need to be removed. Follow your doctor's instructions for cleaning the stitched area.
 - Put ice or a cold pack on your painful area for 10 to 20 minutes at a time, several times a day, for the first few days. Put a thin cloth between the ice and your skin.
 - Sit in a few inches of warm water (sitz bath) 3 times a day and after bowel movements. The warm water helps with pain and itching. If you do not have a tub, a warm shower might help.
- Breast fullness
 - Your breasts may overfill (engorge) in the first few days after delivery. To help milk flow and to relieve pain, warm your breasts in the shower or by using warm, moist towels before nursing.
 - If you are not nursing, do not put warmth on your breasts or touch your breasts. Wear a tight bra or sports bra and use ice until the fullness goes away. This usually takes 2 to 3 days.
 - Put ice or a cold pack on your breast after nursing to reduce swelling and pain. Put a thin cloth between the ice and your skin.
- Activity
 - Eat a balanced diet. Do not try to lose weight by cutting calories. Keep taking your prenatal vitamins, or take a multivitamin.
 - Get as much rest as you can. Try to take naps when your baby sleeps during the day.
 - Get some exercise every day. But do not do any heavy exercise until your doctor says it is okay.
 - Wait until you are healed (about 4 to 6 weeks) before you have sexual intercourse. Your doctor will tell you when it is okay to have sex.
 - Talk to your doctor about birth control. You can get pregnant even before your period returns. Also, you can get pregnant while you are breastfeeding.
- Mental health
 - It is normal to have some sadness, anxiety, sleeplessness, and mood swings after you go home. If you feel upset or

hopeless for more than a few days or are having trouble doing the things you need to do, talk to your doctor.

- Constipation and hemorrhoids
 - 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.
 - Eat plenty of fiber each day. Have a bran muffin or bran cereal for breakfast, and try eating a piece of fruit for a mid-afternoon snack.
 - For painful, itchy hemorrhoids, put ice or a cold pack on the area several times a day for 10 minutes at a time. Follow this by putting a warm compress on the area for another 10 to 20 minutes or by sitting in a shallow, warm bath.

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:

- You have severe vaginal bleeding.
- You are dizzy or lightheaded, or you feel like you may faint.
- You have a fever.
- You have new or more pain in your belly or pelvis.
- 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:

- Your vaginal bleeding seems to be getting heavier.
- You have new or worse vaginal discharge.
- You feel sad, anxious, or hopeless for more than a few days.
- You do not get better as expected.

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