



Post Partum

The post-partum period lasts from the time you have delivered your baby to approximately six to eight weeks after childbirth. During this time, a new mother will undergo various physical and emotional changes. Going home with a newborn baby will require some learning and adjustment for new parents, whether it is their first child or fifth! After you are discharged from the hospital, it is very important to care for your body as it undergoes changes.

Changes and care immediately after delivery

The type of delivery (vaginal birth or Caesarean section) will determine the types of changes your body undergoes post-partum.

Vaginal birth

After a vaginal birth, you may spend one night in the hospital if you have not had any major complications.

- Your blood pressure, vaginal bleeding and heart rate will be monitored regularly.
- You may experience pain and discomfort if you have had a vaginal tear or episiotomy (widening of the vaginal opening).
- Your abdomen will be monitored regularly for firmness to monitor shrinking of your uterus.
- Vaginal bleeding is a normal occurrence. Inform your doctor if you experience discharge of large blood clots, high fever or foul odour.
- The perineum (area between the vagina and the rectum) may be swollen and painful due to excessive stretching during the vaginal birth. Applying ice packs helps relieve the discomfort.

Caesarean section

After a Caesarean section, you may experience pain at the surgical site and have to stay two to three days in the hospital.

- The medications administered for a Caesarean section may make you feel nauseated or itchy and the surgical site may hurt while you nurse your baby. Ask for help if you find it difficult to nurse.
- Your blood pressure, bleeding and heart rate will be monitored regularly. The size of your uterus and firmness will be checked.
- Your doctor will prescribe medications to relieve pain.
- Try sitting up and moving around several times a day to promote healing.

Post-partum Home Care

After you are discharged from the hospital, you will be instructed to take warm baths to soothe the vulva and perineal areas to relieve discomfort if you delivered vaginally. Other common post-partum changes and home care remedies to help manage include:

- You may feel tired and sleepy as your body is still undergoing major changes. Take adequate rest, eat nutritious foods and increase your intake of fluids to promote healing and adequate breast milk production.
- Vaginal bleeding may continue for up to eight weeks. Inform your doctor if you experience discharge of large blood clots, foul odour or high fever during this time.



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- You may experience urine leakage for a few months while you cough, sneeze or laugh. This is normal and will resolve. If it does not resolve after six months, contact your obstetrician to investigate.
- Bowel movements are painful after childbirth so it is important to have a diet high in fibre, and if necessary you can also take laxatives or stool softeners to allow easier passage and reduce associated pain and discomfort.
- You may experience skin changes and hair loss due to hormonal changes. This is normal and will return to normal after a few months.
- If you are breastfeeding and you experience discomfort, breast soreness or infection, it is important to contact your doctor, who will give you options for treatment.
- Inform your doctor if you experience deep vein thrombosis or blood clots in the legs.
- You should exercise regularly as instructed by your doctor to help healing, improve mood and to regain your pre-pregnancy body weight.

Post-partum Depression

You may feel sad and “down” post-delivery. This may pass quickly, but if it does not it is important to talk to your obstetrician or obtain referral to a psychiatrist specialising in post-partum depression (also known as postnatal depression).

It is important to understand that many women (and some men) experience post-partum depression and you should not feel embarrassed or ashamed if you think you may be suffering this condition. It is serious, so it is important to seek help as soon as possible to stabilise your emotional and mental health and make sure you are able to care well for your new baby. If you are not sure if you are experiencing post-partum depression but suspect that it is a possibility, it is better to be safe and consult your obstetrician or a psychiatrist.

Beyondblue has a summary of post-partum depression in their website: <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/postnatal-depression>.

If you wish to speak to someone by phone, beyondblue has an excellent phone service and they can be reached 24 hours/7 days a week on 1300 22 4636.