

# Your care at home

You will experience physical and emotional adjustments during the postpartum period (first six weeks following childbirth). The following instructions will assist you after leaving the hospital.

## Activity/rest

- Rest frequently, especially when the baby is sleeping.
- Avoid lifting objects that weigh more than the baby for the first two weeks.
- Allow others to help with housework. Avoid vacuuming.
- Stair climbing may be unavoidable, but try not to overdo.
- Driving a car can be resumed after you have regained your strength and can comfortably press on the brake.

If you delivered your baby by Cesarean section, you need to remember that you have had abdominal surgery. You may find moving, lifting and walking uncomfortable at first. Pay attention to comfort and avoid getting overly tired. You will find it necessary to avoid strenuous activity when you go home. During the first weeks, slowly progress toward resuming normal activities. Short periods of walking followed by rest are ideal.

## Nutrition

A well-balanced diet is essential for healing and to restore your energy. A healthy diet consists of foods from the six food groups, which include dairy products, meat, grains, fruits, vegetables and legumes. Fluid intake should be at least six to eight glasses of liquid per day. Continue to take your prenatal vitamins.

## Breast care for non-nursing mothers

Engorgement is frequently a problem for non-nursing mothers. Wearing a supportive bra 24-hours a day, for at least three to four days or until your breasts feel soft, can help with engorgement. Other helpful hints to alleviate engorgement are:

- Avoid nipple or breast stimulation.
- Place cool compresses or ice packs on your breasts for comfort.
- Avoid heat – even an electric blanket could increase milk production.
- Green cabbage leaves can also be helpful to hasten natural drying up of your breast milk (Refer to the section on green cabbage under Infant Feeding – page 16).

## Cesarean incision care

Wash your abdominal incision with soap while showering. Avoid tub baths until approved by your physician. Inspect your incision for any signs of infection, such as redness, swelling, gapping or drainage. Notify your doctor if any of these occur. It is not necessary to have a dressing over the incision. Steri-strips are applied after the skin staples are removed to aid in keeping the skin edges together during the final healing. Remove the steri-strips in about seven to 10 days, or when they begin to peel off. Take pain medication as directed by your physician.

## Vaginal flow/cramping

Vaginal flow is normal for up to six weeks after delivery. At first, the flow will be bright red; in a few days it becomes pink, then yellowish and finally a creamy white discharge. It is important to change your pad frequently.

You may feel some cramping, particularly if this isn't your first baby. The cramping is caused by contractions which return the uterus to normal size and prevent excessive bleeding. Cramping often occurs while the infant is nursing. Acetaminophen / Ibuprofen products can be helpful for eliminating discomfort. Your uterus will return to its normal size in five to six weeks.



It may be two to four months before your normal menstrual period returns. The first few periods may be heavier than normal. Since ovulation may occur even though you have not reestablished your menstrual cycle, it is possible to become pregnant. It is advisable to consult your physician in regard to family planning before you have intercourse.

## Perineal/hemorrhoidal care

The perineal area requires good personal hygiene to prevent infection. Follow these simple guidelines:

- Clean and wipe from front to back after urinating or having a bowel movement
- Change your peri pad frequently, at least every three to four hours
- Sit in a tub of clean warm water for 20 minutes several times each day
- Do not use douches, feminine hygiene sprays or tampons
- You should be able to resume sexual activity in six weeks, or as directed by your physician
- Continue to use witch hazel pads and sprays as needed for comfort

If hemorrhoids are present, witch hazel pads and hemorrhoidal cream are helpful. Use your rubber ring or a pillow to make sitting more comfortable.

## Elimination

Constipation is common during the first days after delivery. To avoid this problem, it is helpful to eat foods rich in fiber as well as drinking six to eight glasses of fluid. Foods high in fiber are fruits, vegetables, bran and whole-grain breads and cereals. Prune juice may also be helpful. If needed, a mild laxative or stool softener may be used. Call your physician if constipation persists.

Try to urinate every two to four hours. Discomfort before, during or after urination as well as urine that is cloudy, dark or foul smelling should be reported to your physician. Drinking more liquids than the suggested daily amount may also help alleviate the problem.

## "Baby Blues"

Your body will be going through some major hormone changes during the next few weeks. Along with these changes, many women experience some degree of mood fluctuations known as "baby blues." You may feel thrilled and happy at one moment and a little depressed the next moment. "Baby blues" are normal and usually occur from the second day up to four weeks.

Hormonal changes, fatigue, isolation, new and unrelieved responsibilities are usually the cause.

Ways to ease the "blues":

- Get adequate rest. An exhausted mother may have problems with milk production or the adjustment to motherhood. If possible, plan to have a relative or friend assist you for the first week so you can sleep when the baby sleeps. Also, limiting your visitors until you are less tired will help.
- Don't expect too much from yourself. Until you get used to motherhood and your baby... be patient.
- Talk with your partner about the mood fluctuations. He is probably getting concerned and the talk will relieve his fears and gain his support.

## Postpartum Depression

The birth of a child is often a happy time; however, caring for a newborn requires a lot of attention. These changes, although positive, can sometimes cause anxiety, worry or sadness. Women often feel overwhelmed or unsure of their role as a mom. Commonly known as "baby blues," these feelings typically last no more than 10 days to two weeks. However, they may be symptoms of more serious Postpartum Depression (PPD). Early, effective care for PPD can make it easier for your baby to get the attention he or she needs to be healthy while ensuring that you are taking care of yourself.



## Symptoms of PPD

- Feeling sad or down
- Loss of interest in things you used to like to do
- Trouble falling or staying asleep or sleeping too many hours
- Eating more or less than what's normal for you
- Feeling irritable or overwhelmed; experiencing uncontrollable crying
- Having trouble thinking or making decisions or being easily distracted
- Anxiety or worry about little things
- Tired all the time (even if you get your regular amount of sleep)
- Feeling guilty, worthless or like you are a “bad mom”
- Constantly worrying or feeling concern about your baby's health and/or well-being

If you experience two or more of these symptoms, please tell your health care provider, a friend, family member or clergy member immediately – These could be the signs of PPD.

For more information or assistance, contact your health care provider. Help is also available from the professionals at Mercy Behavioral Health Help Center (515) 271-6111.

For additional information:

Postpartum Education for Parents  
(805) 967-7363  
[www.sbpep.org](http://www.sbpep.org)

Postpartum Support International  
[www.postpartum.net](http://www.postpartum.net)

## Follow-up exam

Your physician will instruct you when to make your follow-up exam; usually four to six weeks after delivery. Call your physician's office to make this appointment after you go home from the hospital.

## Reasons to call your physician

Contact your physician as soon as possible if you are experiencing any of the following symptoms:

- Flu-like symptoms
- Temperature higher than 100.4° fahrenheit for more than 24-hours
- Post-postpartum blues severe enough to interfere with taking care of yourself or your baby
- Hot, tender area on your breast or in armpit
- Pain in your chest and/or lower legs
- Persistent pain or foul-smelling discharge from your episiotomy, C-section incision or uterus
- Bleeding more than twice the usual menstrual flow and/or blood clots greater than the size of a golf ball
- Painful urination; foul-smelling urine

