



What to Expect in the First Few Days Postpartum

The first few hours and days after the birth are spent recovering from birth and learning how to feed and care for your baby. It is an important time for you to draw on all your resources for support and rest. This information sheet outlines some of the common concerns and experiences of the early postpartum period. Anytime you have concerns about yourself or the baby, contact your midwife.

Bleeding or Lochia After the birth, you will have a heavy menstrual-like flow, which may increase when you are breastfeeding. In the following days the flow will decrease and the colour of the lochia will change from red to pink to brown and eventually to clear or creamy white. When you get out of bed, you may pass a clot. This is caused by blood pooling up inside the uterus and clotting inside while you are resting. It is expelled when you move into an upright position and this is normal. If you continue to pass clots and you have increased bleeding and cramping, call your midwife. If you soak through an overnight pad in an hour, call your midwife. Sometimes the bleeding seems to stop for a period of time and then return. This reflects an increase in your activity levels. Listen to your body and slow down. Bleeding usually stops within 3-6 weeks after the birth.

Uterus After the birth, the uterus is firm and about the size of a grapefruit. It can be found at or below your belly button. By the tenth day postpartum, you will no longer be able to palpate your uterus as it is contracting down to its normal size. Any time you have excessive bleeding, it is helpful to massage your abdomen as this will cause your uterus to contract and will help stop the bleeding. Breastfeeding contributes to the uterus contracting back down to its original size. You may experience 'afterpains' which are contractions that are involuting (shrinking) your uterus, especially when breastfeeding. Afterpains usually diminish over the first few days after delivery and are mostly seen in clients who have had previous babies. You may take Tylenol and Ibuprofen for afterpains. Lying down on your stomach also helps.

Perineum After urination or bowel movements, use your peribottle to wash the labia and perineum. You can use warm water with a drop or two of lavender essential oil. Also pat dry gently. Take one or two sitz baths a day using Epsom salts, or rosemary tea, which is an astringent that helps with wound healing. Air dry stitches by lying in bed with all clothes and pads removed and a towel or pad underneath to protect the bed. You may also use a clean hand held hairdryer. You may purchase a sitz bath that fits on your toilet at a drugstore or sit in a well cleaned tub with several inches of water. For the first 24 hours after the birth, use ice packs or frozen menstrual pads to help with swelling. Arnica is also helpful. You can start Kegel exercises soon after birth to assist your perineum in healing and strengthening.

Breasts and Nipples If you are breastfeeding, for the first one to three days you will produce colostrum, which is packed full of antibodies and proteins and is all your baby needs. After this, you will begin to produce mature milk in a much greater amount. Your milk supply will increase the more the baby feeds. Feed baby at least 8 times in 24hrs or more! You may feel hot, flushed and emotional when your milk comes in; this is normal, but you should not develop a fever above 38C. If your breasts become very full and engorged with milk, you can use a warm cloth around the breast, or stand in the shower and hand express a little milk before a feed to help the milk to flow. A cold pack or green cabbage leaves on the breast can help for after feeds, as well as taking Ibuprofen. After feeds you can apply a little colostrum/breastmilk to your nipples and let them air dry. Contact your midwife if you have a hard, painful or red breast lump, a fever 38C or above, very painful/cracked nipples or are struggling to breastfeed your baby.

Bowel Movements Usually it takes two or three days for your normal stooling pattern to return. You may feel that your stitches will 'burst' with a bowel movement. However, stitches are strong and the perineum heals very quickly. You can have a bowel movement with no problem. For reassurance, you can gently support your stitches with a warm cloth while you have your bowel movement. To keep your bowel movements soft, eat fiber foods such as vegetables, fruits, whole grains, nuts and legumes and drink 8-10 glasses of water a day. You may use a stool softener such as Metamucil; contact your midwife if you think you need other stool softeners. You can use hemorrhoid creams after bowel movements if needed.

Urination You should be able to urinate within a few hours of the birth. You may need help to get up, especially if you feel light headed. You can spray with your peribottle to dilute your urine and prevent stinging; some people prefer to urinate in the shower. Ensure to urinate every few hours, especially during the first 24hrs as keeping your bladder empty is an important part of helping your uterus to stay firm and avoiding excessive bleeding. Contact your midwife if you cannot urinate.

Activity For the first while, your only activity should be resting, eating and caring for your baby. This is especially important if you had birth complications, a significant vaginal tear or a C-section. Leave the house work to others and try to let go of some of your usual expectations. The more you rest now, the quicker you will recover. Make some time to have brief undivided time with your other children, as this can help during their adjustment to the new baby. Limit your guests in number and in length of visit, unless they are the helpful type who can clean, cook or help with your other children! Have a brief walk around your yard or sit out in the sunshine, but avoid public places if you can. Starting Kegel exercises in the first few days can help your perineum to recover, however wait until later in the postpartum period to begin your regular exercises.

Personal hygiene Showering will make you feel refreshed and help prevent infection. In the first few days, you will sweat a lot as your body reduces excess fluid/blood volume from the pregnancy. You can have a bath with half a cup of salt in the tub. Some people will experience a rise in temperature that lasts about 12 hours after the milk first comes in. If you should have a temperature at or greater than 100.4 F or 38 C, contact your midwife.