

Postpartum Recovery: What to Expect in the First Few Days and How to Manage It



Highlights

In the first few days after birth, your body and emotions will undergo many changes.

Rest whenever your baby is asleep, whether it's day or night.

Drink plenty of water and maintain a healthy, fiber-rich diet.

If you experience symptoms of depression or infection, contact your healthcare provider.

In This Article

Understanding Your Postpartum Recovery

Starting Breastfeeding and Baby Care

Coping with Emotional Changes

Navigating Visitors and Social Interactions

Resuming Normal Activities and Relationships

Understanding Your Postpartum Recovery

In the first few days after childbirth, your body will experience a range of physical and emotional changes. These changes can vary depending on whether you

had a vaginal or cesarean birth. Knowing what to expect can help you feel better prepared for this transition period.

Lochia (Vaginal Bleeding) After birth, you will experience vaginal bleeding called lochia. Initially, it will be heavy and bright red, and may include clots. It is important to change your maternity pads regularly to maintain hygiene and prevent infections.

Key facts about lochia:

Bleeding is normal, but if you notice large clots or an unusual odor, contact your healthcare provider.

The bleeding will gradually lighten and change to a brownish color over time. Lochia can last up to 6 weeks, but usually becomes lighter after the first few days.

Afterbirth Pains You may experience afterbirth pains, similar to period pains, as your uterus contracts back to its pre-pregnancy size. These contractions are more noticeable if this is not your first baby.

Pain may be more noticeable while breastfeeding, as suckling triggers hormones that help shrink the uterus. A warm pack on your abdomen or taking paracetamol can ease discomfort. If the pain persists or intensifies, consult your healthcare provider.

Vagina and Vulva Sensitivity Your vagina and vulva may feel sore and tender after childbirth, especially if you had a vaginal delivery. This is normal and will improve over time.

Using an ice pack and pain-relief medicines can help with the soreness. Avoid sitting directly on your bottom to reduce pressure on the area. Wearing supportive underwear, such as control briefs, can provide extra comfort during the weeks after birth. Choose a size or two larger than your pre-pregnancy size to accommodate changes in your body.

If you had stitches from tearing or an episiotomy, keep the area clean by bathing in warm water and patting it dry carefully to avoid infection. Stitches usually dissolve within 1 to 2 weeks.

Start pelvic floor exercises as soon as you feel comfortable to help with healing and improve bladder control.

Using the ToiletAfter birth, it is common to experience some difficulty using the toilet due to the physical strain of labor and recovery.

Drink plenty of water to dilute your urine and reduce any stinging sensations when urinating.

Constipation is common, so eating fiber-rich foods like fresh fruits, vegetables, wholemeal bread, and cereals is essential.

Hemorrhoids (piles) may develop due to straining during bowel movements. Avoid pushing too hard, and if you experience discomfort, seek advice from your healthcare provider.

You may also experience urinary incontinence, such as leaking urine when laughing or coughing. Pelvic floor exercises can help. If the issue persists, speak with your doctor, who may refer you to a physiotherapist.

Cesarean Section RecoveryRecovery from a cesarean section (C-section) typically takes longer than recovery from a vaginal birth. You may experience soreness around the incision site.

Dissolving stitches are usually used in a C-section, so they do not need to be removed.

Keep the area clean by bathing in warm water and drying it carefully afterward.

Loose clothing may provide more comfort during healing.

If you experience pain, swelling, or signs of infection, contact your healthcare provider immediately.

Starting Breastfeeding and Baby Care

Breastfeeding usually begins a few days after birth, around 2 to 5 days

postpartum, when your milk comes in. Initially, your milk will be thin and bluish-white.

Frequent feedings stimulate milk production and increase your milk supply.

Newborns typically need to feed 8 to 12 times within 24 hours, meaning you may feed every 2 to 3 hours, including at night.

Feed your baby whenever they show signs of hunger. If your baby is sleepy, gently wake them for a feeding.

Coping with Emotional Changes

The days following childbirth can be both physically and emotionally exhausting. Hormonal changes often contribute to mood swings, and it's normal to experience a range of emotions during this time.

You may feel sadness, irritability, and increased sensitivity.

These emotional changes are often referred to as the "baby blues" and typically last no more than 2 weeks.

If you continue to feel very down after 2 weeks, or if you have thoughts of harming yourself or your baby, seek help from a healthcare professional. This may be a sign of postnatal depression, which requires treatment.

Navigating Visitors and Social Interactions

Set boundaries regarding when and how many visitors you want to have. It's perfectly fine to delay or limit visits in order to focus on your healing.

If you feel exhausted, don't hesitate to ask visitors to leave or reschedule their visit.

While it's nice to have visitors to celebrate your baby's arrival, it can also be overwhelming. You may prefer to rest and recover.

Resuming Normal Activities and Relationships

There is no specific timeline for resuming sexual activity after childbirth. It depends on how your body is healing and your personal comfort level.

You may experience a decrease in sexual desire due to physical recovery, fatigue, or hormonal changes.

It's important to listen to your body and take your time. If you experience pain or discomfort during sex, consult your healthcare provider.

To prevent another pregnancy, use contraception starting 21 days after birth. You can discuss options such as condoms, progestogen-only pills, or a contraceptive implant with your healthcare provider during your 6-week check-up.

Recovery from Birth

Recovering from childbirth can take time, and it may be more challenging if complications arise. Both physical and emotional support are crucial during this time.

If you had a difficult birth or complications afterward, talk with your healthcare provider for guidance.

Mental health support is just as important. Organizations offering peer support services and advice for birth trauma can be helpful during your recovery.

Tools and Assistance

During your postpartum recovery, there are several tools and resources available to help you. Here are some options you may find helpful:

Physical Health Support

Pelvic Floor Exercises: Start pelvic floor exercises to promote healing and strengthen your muscles.

Ice Packs and Pain Relief: Use ice packs for soreness and over-the-counter pain relief to alleviate discomfort.

Supportive Underwear: Invest in control briefs or larger underwear for added

comfort after birth.

Breastfeeding Assistance

Breastfeeding Support Groups: Join local or online breastfeeding groups for advice and support.

Lactation Consultants: A lactation consultant can help if you're struggling with breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding Pillows: Consider using a breastfeeding pillow to improve comfort during nursing.

Emotional Support

Therapy or Counseling: If you're feeling overwhelmed, counseling or therapy can help with emotional recovery.

Peer Support Networks: Connecting with other new mothers can provide emotional support during the transition.

Postnatal Depression Helplines: Reach out to specialized helplines for advice and support if you're experiencing signs of postnatal depression.

Practical Assistance

Postpartum Doula Services: A postpartum doula can provide both physical and emotional support during your recovery.

Home Care Assistance: Consider hiring help with household tasks or caring for your baby if you're feeling overwhelmed.

Medical Assistance

Healthcare Provider Visits: Keep regular appointments with your healthcare provider to monitor your physical and emotional recovery.

Specialized Postnatal Care: If needed, your healthcare provider can refer you to specialists for ongoing support and care.