

Your Recovery After Vaginal Birth

After you give birth, a nurse will check you and answer any questions you may have. During your stay, the nurses will teach you how to care for yourself and your baby.

Changes in Your Body

A nurse will feel your abdomen to check your uterus while you are in the hospital. If your uterus is soft, your nurse will rub your abdomen to help the uterus become firm.

During this time, it is normal to have cramping or “afterbirth pains” as your uterus gets back to its regular size. This cramping also helps prevent heavy bleeding. Women often have afterbirth pains for a few days after delivery. You may feel very strong afterbirth pains if you have a full bladder and during breastfeeding.

After giving birth, you will have vaginal bleeding, called lochia. During the first few days, the bleeding may be like a heavy menstrual period and you may pass small blood clots. The bleeding will decrease and get lighter in color. Women can have discharge for up to 4 to 6 weeks. Use sanitary pads instead of tampons during this time.

Your breasts will fill with milk 3 to 5 days after you give birth. They may leak at times. Your breasts may be tender and become firm. If you are breastfeeding, do it regularly and avoid missed feedings. If you are not breastfeeding, wear a supportive bra, but do not bind your breasts.

You may have constipation. A stool softener or laxative may be ordered by your doctor. Eat foods that are high in fiber (fruits, vegetables, whole-grains) and drink plenty of water.

Tell your doctor or nurse if you have problems urinating.

Activity

- **Ask the staff for help the first few times you get out of bed.**
- Sit up for a couple of minutes before you start to walk.
- If you feel light headed or dizzy while in the bathroom, pull the **emergency call light on the bathroom wall for help.**
- Walk in the hallways 3 to 4 times a day for 5 to 10 minutes. Slowly increase your activity over the next several weeks. Make sure to rest often.

Diet

You may feel tired and hungry. You will get fluids through an IV (intravenous) in your hand or arm until you are drinking well. Drink plenty of fluids. You will be offered light food at first and then you can eat your normal diet.

Manage Pain

Pain and cramping are normal. If you have stitches, they may cause burning or stinging. **Ask for pain medicine when you need it.** The medicine may not get rid of your pain, but it will make it better. Manage your pain so you can care for yourself and be active.

The perineal area, or perineum, is the area between your vagina and anus. It may tear during vaginal birth or be cut at the vagina to help your baby come out, called an episiotomy. If stitches are needed to repair the area, they do not need removed.

To manage pain in the perineum:

- Place an ice pack on your perineal area the first day for short amounts of time to decrease pain and swelling.
- Use a sitz bath to relieve discomfort. Sitz baths are portable bowls that fit on top of the toilet seat and can be filled with warm water. Soak the perineal area in the water for 15 to 20 minutes, or as recommended. Gently pat dry with toilet paper. Use the sitz bath several times a day.
- Take a warm bath. Baths can be started 24 hours after giving birth. Do not use bubble bath or perfumed soaps.
- Hemorrhoids are common in pregnancy and after delivery. Apply a topical medicine, such as a spray, cream or witch hazel pads, to help to help relieve rectal pain.

Peri Care

Keep the perineal area clean to prevent infection and stop odor. This is called peri care. You will be given a plastic bottle to fill with warm water. Each time you use the toilet, use the plastic bottle to squirt warm water over your perineal area. Gently blot with toilet paper. Change your sanitary pad each time you use the toilet or at least every 2 to 4 hours. Wash your hands with soap and water.

Showering

A shower may feel good and help you relax. Have someone help you with the first shower.

Going Home from the Hospital

Your nurse will help you prepare to go home. Information will be given to you on how to care for yourself. Your care may include:

- Limiting the number of times you climb stairs each day.
- Lifting nothing heavier than your baby.
- Getting help doing housework for at least 2 weeks.
- Not driving a car for 2 weeks.
- Not having sexual relations until approved by your doctor. Talk to your doctor about birth control. Breastfeeding does not prevent you from becoming pregnant.
- Not going back to work until approved by your doctor.

Call your doctor right away if you have:

- A fever over 100.4 degrees F or 38 degrees C.
- Signs of a breast infection such as fever, tenderness, redness, or a hot, hardened area, on one or both breasts.
- Heavy vaginal bleeding where you soak one sanitary pad per hour for two hours or have large blood clots.
- Vaginal bleeding that changes color turning bright red after it has lightened and changed from pink to brown or clear.
- Foul smelling vaginal discharge—a normal discharge smells like your menstrual period.
- Problems urinating including trouble starting, burning or pain.
- No bowel movements for 3 days.
- A hot, hard spot in your leg or pain in your lower leg.
- Severe or constant pain or cramping.
- A headache, blurred vision or spots before your eyes that will not go away.
- Feelings of being very sad, hopeless, anxious, or feel you want to hurt yourself or your baby.