

Instruction for your well-being after giving birth

Beginning parenthood can be an exciting yet frustrating time. There are changes in your body, your emotions, your relationships with friends and relatives, and in the way you live your life. As you leave the hospital and begin a new routine at home, you will develop the skills that you need to care for your infant. Relax and remember that you are not born with the skills; they are learned and it takes time. It is especially important to take care of your physical and mental well-being. A proper diet and daily exercise will increase your energy level and help you get back in shape.

After delivery, you should continue to watch for any abnormal changes in your health. Call your doctor if you notice any of the following symptoms:

- Fever over 100.4 F (38C)
- Nausea and vomiting
- Painful urination, burning, urgency
- Bleeding heavier than your normal period
- Pain, swelling, tenderness in legs
- Chest pain and cough
- Hot, tender breasts
- Persistent episiotomy pain with increasing tenderness
- Having baby blues that last more than 2 weeks after delivery
- Having feelings of depression and anger

During the first six weeks postpartum, depending on the type of delivery you had (easy or difficult, vaginal or caesarean), how much help you have at home and other individual factors, you may experience all or only some of the following:

Physically:

- Continued vaginal discharge (lochia) turning brownish, then yellowish-white
- Fatigue
- Some pain, discomfort and numbness in the perineum if you had a vaginal delivery (especially if you had stitches)
- Diminishing incision pain, continuing numbness if you had caesarean delivery (especially if it was your first)
- Continued constipation (although this should be easing up)
- Gradual flattening of your abdomen as your uterus recedes into the pelvis (only exercise will bring you back to pre pregnancy shape, but is not recommended until you are released by your doctor)
- Gradual loss of weight
- Breast discomfort and nipple soreness until breastfeeding is well established
- Aching pain in arms and in neck (from carrying the baby)
- Hair loss

Emotionally:

- Elation, depression or swings between the two
- A sense of being overwhelmed, a growing feeling of confidence or swings between the two
- Decreased or increased sexual desire

Nutrition and Diet

You will lose up to 20 pounds in the first 4 weeks after delivery. If you keep eating the well-balanced diet that you begin in pregnancy in an amount that is right for your body weight, you'll be close to your normal weight within several months. Combining this diet that exercise will keep you muscles toned.

If you are breastfeeding, you will need extra fluids, calories, calcium and protein. You should avoid alcohol and other drugs that can harm your body because they can be passed to the baby through the breast milk.

Episiotomy

Like any freshly repaired wound, the site of any episiotomy or laceration will take time to heal (usually 7-10 days). Pain alone during this time, unless it is very severe, is not an indication that an infection has developed. Infection is possible, but very unlikely if good perineal care has been practiced.

Though discomfort is likely to be greater if you've had a repair, suggestions for relief are usually welcomed by all. Cold packs applied immediately after delivery often lessen the discomfort of any episiotomy. Later on, cold packs or a warm sitz bath can also make you more comfortable and help the healing process.

Hemorrhoids

Hemorrhoids can protrude or become swollen and painful during pregnancy, labor, and delivery. Sprays, ointments, or dry or moist heat can provide further relief. Cold witch hazel compresses are also very soothing. Hemorrhoids will gradually decrease in size and may even disappear.

Resuming Sexual Relations

Depending on how your incision is healing and when your cervix returns to normal, your doctor may recommend that you wait anywhere from four to six weeks to resume actual intercourse.

Follow Up Visit

You should make an appointment to visit your doctor 2-6 weeks after the birth of your baby. Your weight, blood pressure, breasts and abdomen will be checked and you will be given a pelvic exam. At this visit, the doctor will also discuss with you the method of birth control that you will be using. If you plan on using a diaphragm and your cervix has recovered sufficiently, you will be fitted for one; if not, you may have to use condoms until you can be fitted. If you are not breastfeeding and plan to take birth control pills, they may be prescribed at this visit.

This is the best time to resolve and problems you may be having and to prepare for an ongoing program of health care for the future.