



Care of the Mother After Delivery

The first few hours and days after delivery are spent learning how to feed and care for your baby. It is an important time for the mother to draw on all her 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 two pads 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 3-4 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 navel. 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 your uterus, especially when breastfeeding. Afterpains usually diminish over the first few days after delivery and are mostly seen in women 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 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.

Bowel Movements Usually it takes two or three days for your normal stooling pattern to return. You may use a stool softener such as Metamucil. 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. Eat fiber and drink 8-10 glasses of water a day. Use hemorrhoid creams after bowel movements.

Urination You should be able to void within a few hours of the birth. You may need help to get up, especially if you feel light headed. Always spray with your peribottle to dilute your urine and prevent stinging. You may void in the shower. Contact your midwife if you cannot void.

Activity Your only activity should be resting and caring for your baby. Leave the house work to others. Make some time to have brief undivided time with siblings. Limit your guests in number and in length of visit. Have a brief walk around your yard or sit out in the sunshine, but avoid public places. You can start an exercise program later in the postpartum period. Do Kegels for now.

Personal hygiene Showering will make you feel refreshed and prevent infection. In the first few days, you will perspire a lot. A few days after the birth you can have a bath with half a cup of salt in the tub. Some women 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.