



Your Guide to Postpartum Care



Taking Care of Yourself

As a new mother, you'll get a lot of advice on caring for your baby. It is also very important to take special care of yourself for the next several weeks. The information in this book is intended as a guide for your personal care, but is not intended to take the place of your doctor's advice.

Postpartum doctor's visit

Unless you have a problem that requires seeing your doctor earlier, you should arrange for a follow-up examination about three to six weeks after your baby is born. At that time, your doctor will check your general physical condition and give you a thorough exam.

If you have had a Caesarean delivery, your doctor will let you know when you should make an office visit.

Breast care

If you are breastfeeding, you should continue to follow the instructions given at the hospital for breast care. Remember that it is important to empty the breasts frequently in order to encourage and maintain a good milk supply and prevent infection. If your infant is not emptying the breast at least every 3 hours, please use a breast pump to do so. Please feel free to call lactation at (513)585-0597 or email questions to lactation@TheChristHospital.com.

Your breasts will feel fuller or heavier between the second and the fourth day after giving birth, as you begin making larger amounts of milk. If you are breastfeeding, nurse your baby often, every two to three hours during this time. Take a warm shower or apply a warm compress to your breast just before feeding, and soften the areola by gently hand expressing your milk prior to nursing your baby should the breast be so full that it is hard for the infant to latch on.

If you are not breastfeeding and your milk still "comes in," wear a good support bra and take pain medication. Some women find ice packs helpful. Don't run hot water on your breasts or nurse your baby, since this will stimulate milk production.



Caring for your back

The changes that took place in your body during pregnancy may have put undue strain on your back. Here's how to care for your back and minimize future discomfort:

- Never bend from the waist without bending the knees.
- Avoid any position in which your back is arched.
- Carry packages and your baby high, close to your chest.
- Never twist your body to lift an object or your baby; face them squarely.
- When seated, it's restful for your back to have the knees higher than the hips. You'll also find a rocking chair restful, since the back and forth motion changes the groups of muscles used.



Nutrition

Your doctor will tell you if you have any special dietary needs. In general, you may eat anything you like, observing the guidelines of sensible nutrition.

If you gained a bit too much weight during pregnancy, you'll want to stay away from fattening foods until your normal figure has returned. This is particularly important if you're planning another baby soon, so you can start your pregnancy at your ideal weight.

If you are breastfeeding, eat a variety of foods for a healthy, well-balanced diet. Remember that no foods are "off limits", but if you have a concern please contact lactation.

Here are some other things to remember if you are breastfeeding your baby:

- You'll need 200-500 calories a day more than usual. Your body uses these calories for milk production.
- Drink fluids to quench your thirst; fruit juices, water and milk are good choices.
- Avoid large amounts of alcohol, tobacco and recreational drugs.
- If you need to take a medication, be sure the physician who prescribes it knows you are breastfeeding. Most medicines are safe to take while breastfeeding, but always check first with your physician and lactation.



Bleeding or flow

During pregnancy, your uterus builds up a great deal of blood and nutrients to help supply your baby's nutritional needs. After birth, the body gets rid of this through lochia, or flow, which is similar to your period.

During the first couple of days, the flow will be red and about the same amount as a menstrual period. From the third through the tenth day, the flow will be pink mucous with some spotting. From about the tenth day through the 21st, it will be clear to brownish. These amounts are the average – yours may vary.

After breastfeeding, you may feel some cramping and an increase in flow. You may also notice a temporary increase in flow if you participate in strenuous activity.

Be sure to notify your physician if:

- the flow suddenly becomes heavy
- you notice large clots
- you develop a fever

You should avoid tampons and douching until about six weeks after the birth of your baby.



Bathing



As long as you are steady on your feet, you may shower and shampoo any time after delivery. Your doctor may allow you to take a tub bath with about four inches of water in the tub. Avoid bubble baths and perfumed oil baths, since they're irritating to the birth canal. If you have uncomfortable stitches or hemorrhoids, try a sitz bath three times a day for a soothing remedy, whether or not you are bleeding.

Episiotomy care

Your stitches require no special care while healing. If they cause you discomfort, continue to use Tucks® or the ointment given to you in the hospital. A sitz bath also is helpful in relieving the discomfort.



Incisional care

If you have had a Caesarean Section, be sure to keep your incision clean and dry. Monitor daily for signs and symptoms of infection, such as redness, swelling, drainage, warmth to the touch or fever. Call your doctor if any of these symptoms develop.

Postpartum sex

Your doctor will advise you how long to wait before resuming sexual intercourse (usually three to six weeks). One of the reasons for this wait is to avoid infection. When the cervix has closed and the flow has stopped, the chances of infection are greatly decreased. The place in your uterus where the placenta was attached also heals during this time (around 18 to 21 days).

Another reason to wait to resume sex is to allow your stitches to heal. If you’ve had stitches, intercourse may cause discomfort at first. This often can be eased by a slight change of position, including the use of a pillow to raise the hips.

If you have other questions or problems about resuming sex, talk to your physician.

If you note a decrease in vaginal secretions, you may want to try a lubricant.

Contraception

If you plan to use contraception, discuss methods with your doctor while you are in the hospital, and again at your first postpartum visit. He or she will help you decide what method of birth control to use, based on your needs and preferences.

The fitting or re-fitting of a diaphragm is usually postponed until approximately six weeks after delivery when swelling in the pelvic area begins to go down. There are other methods, however, that you can use sooner, such as foam, condoms or spermicides, if approved by your doctor.

Fatigue

Even the healthiest of women find they may tire easily during the weeks or months after a baby's birth. Trying to take on too much too soon can exhaust you and make emotions worse. The solution is easy – the moment you feel tired, rest. Alternate an hour of activity with an hour of resting with your feet up. A good way to do this is for you to rest when your baby rests.

If you have help during the first few weeks, let them do the household chores and devote your time to caring for and getting acquainted with your baby. By the end of the fourth week, you should be up to full activity.

Here are some tips to avoid fatigue:

- Don't climb stairs more than necessary.
- Don't lift anything heavier than your baby.

When you do lift, use your knees as a lifting force to avoid strain on your back.

- Let your family and friends help with chores and meals.
- Dress and diaper your baby at a level where you don't have to bend.





The “blues”

For the past nine months, you and your family and friends have gone through the adjustments of pregnancy. Everyone has been through the worry and you’ve been through the strenuous physical labor of pregnancy and birth. Finally, you’re at home with your baby. These should, it seems, be the happiest days of your life.

Although these days will be a wonderful time for you, your baby and family, don’t be surprised if for a time you feel depressed without reason. Perhaps you feel let down after the excitement and anticipation of the last few months.

Perhaps you’re having increasing doubts about your ability to cope with the around-the-clock demands of motherhood. You may feel resentful, and guilty about your feelings of resentment, at being tied down with your new responsibilities as a mother. You may feel discouraged and emotional.

Keep in mind that these postpartum emotions are quite common and part of the adjustment new parenthood requires. In a week or two, you and your family will become accustomed to your new responsibilities and lifestyle. If these feelings become too overwhelming or persist greater than two weeks, you or your family should call your doctor.

In some cases medication may be helpful.



Exercise



Taking care of your body through exercising after your delivery will also care for your mind during this transitional time in your life. Be sure to check with your doctor before beginning any exercises. Start slow and be mindful of having unrealistic expectations.



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