

Postpartum Instructions



Welcome to life with a new baby! This is an exciting time and in the next six weeks you will be in the postpartum period. While these instructions pertain mostly to the first few days, you should always be monitoring your and your baby's health throughout these weeks. Please call your midwife with any concerns or questions at any time. We ask you call us 8-12 hours after we leave your birth so we can check in on you and your baby.

Your body

Your bleeding will seem like heavy period flow for the first 24 hours, and be bright. After that it should decrease to normal period-like bleeding for 1-5 days. After that, it should decrease even further, perhaps to even a panty-liner flow. Clots up to roughly a quarter-size may be passed, especially if you have been lying down. **If at any point your bleeding becomes bright red and increases suddenly after having decreased, decrease your activity and call your midwife. Also call if you are filling one pad in half an hour, feel dizzy or are concerned about the level of bleeding.**

Postpartum bleeding has its own odor, slightly different than that of a normal period. It should not smell foul, however. Uterine pain and/or foul-smelling discharge with a fever are signs of a uterine infection. Be sure to wash your hands before you change your pad and check your temperature if you feel any cold or flu-like symptoms. You might experience a slight increase in temperature when your milk comes in, but it should not go higher than 100.4. **Call the midwife if you have any of the above symptoms.**

Your perineum might be swollen and tender for some days, especially if you tore. After urinating, pat dry, do not wipe. Use your peri-bottle to dilute the urine, decrease any stinging and clean away feces. Let your perineum be open to the air at least 20 minutes each day (ideally after a shower or bath). If you did not purchase a sitz bath in your birth kit, there are other options to aid healing. An ice pack (10 minutes on, 10 minutes off) can help with swelling. A peri-soak of 1 cup sea salt in 4-5 inches of warm water in clean tub each day can help clean and decrease swelling. **Call your midwife if you have an increase in pain, pain that radiates down into your leg, or any foul smell.**

Protect your nipples! Pain is almost always caused by a poor latch. Work at every nursing to ensure a good latch to avoid any cracking or blistering – once you are there, it can be very difficult for nipples to heal. Drink a full glass of water at each nursing. This is also a great time to eat! Make sure both you and baby are comfortable and that your whole body is relaxed. Your milk will “come in” around day three (often the time when your hormones are roller-coasting as well) and your breasts might become engorged. **Call the midwife if you have any sore lumps, red streaks on the breast, fever or body-aches.**

Expect your first bowel movement 2-3 days after the birth. Before that comes, be sure you are drinking plenty of water (2 cups of prune juice daily is highly recommended as well) and eating high-fiber foods to avoid constipation. Expect also to urinate frequently. Your body is going through diuresis, the process of ridding itself of excess fluids. This is normal and good. To aid in the process, be sure you are drinking at least 15 glasses of water or pregnancy tea daily.

Expect your whole body to feel fatigued and sore for the first couple days – you just went through the hardest workout of your life! You should rest in bed, only rising to go to the bathroom or to walk to another room, for the first 2 days. **You should not be left alone in the house for the first 48 hours. In the first two days, always have someone available to help you to the bathroom if needed.** It is absolutely vital for your body's health (now and long-term) and your milk supply to be established for you to rest and recover. We recommend not leaving the house for the first two weeks – take the time to marvel in your new baby, life will resume soon enough!

Your first “exercises” should be tummy tightening and small walks around the house. Avoid returning to your normal level of activity until 6 weeks postpartum. This is also often the time intercourse resumes once bleeding has stopped, the perineum has healed, and you both desire that intimacy. It often takes longer, depending on how you feel.

Your baby

After a good first nursing, your baby might sleep for 4-6 hours. This should be the only time you let such a stretch of sleep occur. Newborns need to be fed whenever they want to eat, or at least every 2-3 hours for the first few weeks. This is important for their health (stabilize their glucose levels, stay hydrated, and shows a normally functioning GI tract) and for your body to know how to establish its milk supply. **It is normal for a baby to wake itself every 3 hours or so to nurse, nurse for 20-40 minutes and for the latch to feel good and effective. It is not normal for a baby who had been interested in nursing and nursing well to begin avoiding the nipple, become uninterested, or become lethargic. Call your midwife immediately if this happens.**

Baby's breathing can sound irregular in rhythm, especially while sleeping. It is normal for a newborn to cough, sneeze or sound stuffy the first few days as their air passages clear. **Breathing should not sound labored or difficult. If a baby is looking dusky or blue or is limp, reposition the head and stimulate for a few seconds. If the color does not return to pink and baby remains limp, go to the ER immediately.**

The umbilical cord should dry up and fall off in 4-10 days. Keep the stump out above the diaper and dry. We will show you how to use goldenseal to care for it. **The skin surrounding the belly button should not be red, swollen or streaked.**

Your baby should urinate and pass meconium in the first 24 hours. The wet and dirty diapers then somewhat correspond to how many days old baby is, up to a week. **6-8 wet diapers is normal, less can mean dehydration and you should call your midwife.** The meconium stools should change to greenish and then to yellow-orange and seedy as your milk comes in.

Your baby might appear jaundiced (yellowing of whites of eyes and skin) in the first 2-7 days after birth. Usually this is a normal physiological process. Effective, frequent nursing can reduce jaundice. **If you notices jaundice before 24 hours of age and/or your baby is hard to wake and uninterested in nursing, call your midwife immediately.**



POSTPARTUM WARNING SIGNS

Call the midwife **IMMEDIATELY** if you or the baby have any of the following:

BABY

- Temperature high or low (under armpit temperature is normal between 97.5-99.0)
- Respiratory difficulty: noisy grunting on the exhale, flaring nostrils with each breath, ribs stick out when inhaling
- Blue or grey in the torso or head, especially around the lips
- Yellow or orange skin in the first 24 hours
- Lethargy: can't wake up even with stimulation, very tired, can't eat
- Seizures: possible signs include eyes rolling upward or fluttering; stiffening of the body; movements of the tongue, lip smacking or excessive sucking; staring spells or periods of unresponsiveness. They can be very easily missed and are generally rare.
- Develops a high-pitched cry
- Will not feed
- Skin bruising or unusual bleeding
- ANY bleeding from a circumcision (a baby can bleed to death by losing just a couple ounces of blood)

MOTHER

- Fever greater than 100.4 F
- Localized swelling or tenderness in breasts, especially if accompanied by body aches or fever.
- Tender or sore nipples
- Discomfort or burning when urinating, or have difficulty
- Sharp pains in your abdomen, chest or breast
- Blurred vision or dizziness, with or without a headache
- Headache
- Pain in your legs, especially the calf muscle when you extend your foot
- A foul smell or unexpected change in your bleeding
- Bleeding more than 6 weeks
- Any strong sense that something is "wrong" with you or your baby
- Crying spells or mood swings that feel out of control or do not get better with more sleep, rest, food
- Thoughts of harming yourself or your baby