



Your Postpartum Body

Your Uterus

In the first few days after the birth your uterus should feel firm, about the size of a grapefruit with the top edge (called the fundus) at or below the level of your belly button. It will shrink down over time, and generally can't be felt through your tummy by about two weeks postpartum. Many women, particularly those who have given birth previously, will have "after-pains" when the uterus contracts during these first few days—especially when the baby breastfeeds. These after-pains usually do not last more than 2-3 days postpartum.

- If your uterus feels painful or very tender to touch, particularly if accompanied by a fever, call your midwife
- Check that your uterus feels firm and central—if it is high or off to one side, you likely need to empty an overly full bladder (a full bladder can inhibit the uterus from contracting properly, which may cause increased bleeding)
- Treat after-pains with Ibuprofen and/or Extra Strength Tylenol (ask your midwife about dosage)

Your Flow

Your blood flow (lochia) may be like a heavy menstrual period in the first days after the birth. It will be most heavy in the first 24 hours but will then decrease over the next few days. It will also change colour over these first days, from bright red to brownish-red, and over the coming weeks to pink then whitish-yellow. It will smell similar to a menstrual period. It may last from one week up to six weeks postpartum. It is also normal to pass large clots—even up to the size of a large mandarin orange! Check your uterus for firmness and location at least twice a day for the first few days. If your flow reappears, increases or becomes red again after the first week, this is probably a sign that you are doing too much and need to rest more.

If you soak more than one pad completely in less than 20 minutes page your midwife immediately, then:

- Check your fundus to see that it is firm. If not, massage vigorously until it feels firm, like a grapefruit
- Check to see if you need to empty your bladder (a full bladder can inhibit the uterus from contracting properly, which may cause increased bleeding)

Call your midwife if:

- Your flow starts to have a foul smell
- Your flow increases and continues at an increased rate

Your Breasts

Most nipple soreness is due to incorrect latch of the baby at the breast. Air-dry your nipples often and rub a little breast milk onto your nipples after each feeding. You do not need to wash your breasts/nipples with anything other than warm water. To treat dry, cracked or sore nipples, use only specially formulated nipple-creams that are safe for baby, such as Lansinoh or Pure-Lan. Check your breasts regularly for tender areas or lumps that may indicate blocked milk ducts. Massage such areas towards the nipple while the baby feeds. Feed baby often to prevent breast engorgement and blocked ducts. Report tender areas/lumps that are accompanied by redness, fever or flu-like symptoms as this may be a sign of a developing infection.

- Take time to get into a comfortable position for breastfeeding



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- Be patient about getting a good latch—do not settle for a sore or “pinchy” latch that will cause even more soreness for later feeds
- Check your breasts frequently for tender areas, lumps and blockages
- Call your midwife if you have a hot, red, tender area, or a painful lump on your breast, particularly if you have a fever and/or flu-like symptoms

Your Perineum

Your perineum will likely be sore/tender for the first days after the birth. Squeeze warm water onto your perineum with a plastic squeeze bottle every time you go to the bathroom to take the sting out of urinating. If you have had stitches or a tear, we recommend at least one sitz bath a day. Soak in a clean tub filled with several inches of warm water. Some women find that a portable sitz bath (found at your local drug store) is more convenient. You may add herbal tinctures that are known to promote wound healing (i.e. calendula or comfrey) or half a cup of epsom salts. After bathing, allow time for your perineum to be exposed to the air as this also promotes healing: lie down on a towel or pad for around 30 minutes, or use a hand held hair dryer on a warm setting. The normal healing process for stitches or tears progresses from tenderness in the first days to slightly itchy. Lying down as much as possible, rather than sitting, limits unnecessary pressure on your perineum and maximizes healing blood flow/circulation to the area. Try to minimize standing for long periods of time, or too much stair-climbing. If your perineum is aching, you have probably been on your feet too long and need to rest.

- Use a squeeze bottle to cleanse and reduce discomfort when using the toilet
- Change pads frequently
- Sitz baths, herbal tinctures, ice packs provide comfort and aid healing
- Expose your perineum to air once or twice a day
- Start kegel exercises as soon as possible and do frequently

Your Bowels and Bladder

Urinating may sting for a few days after the birth, even if you do not have stitches. Try spraying warm or cool water over your perineum with the peri-bottle before, during and after you pee. Drinking plenty of fluids will help keep urine dilute which will reduce stinging. It is important to frequently empty your bladder since a prolonged or over-full bladder can stop your uterus from contracting down properly which may lead to increased postpartum bleeding. If you are unable to empty your bladder, call your midwife.

Bowel movements often do not resume until 2-3 days after birth. To help keep bowels regular and stools soft, drink plenty of fluids (8-10 glasses of water/day) and eat high roughage foods such as raw fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Prune juice is known to be helpful. Report painful hemorrhoids to your midwife. Witch Hazel is a good remedy: soak pads or gauze with it and apply to the affected area over your sanitary pad. Pre-moistened pads (Tucks) are available at the drugstore.

- Call your midwife if you can't empty your bladder or if you have pain during or afterwards
- Drink lots of fluids and increase fibre in your diet
- Witch hazel for hemorrhoids
- Ensure your midwife knows if you haven't had a bowel movement for more than 3 days.

Rest and Sleep

Finding time to rest must be a priority. New mothers often have very high energy and do not feel tired immediately after the birth because of all the excitement combined with hormones released by the body to deal with labour. However, over the first 24-48 hours these hormones pass, with most new moms left feeling exceptionally tired. Sleep deprivation is cumulative, thus, one good stretch of sleep will not shift everything back to 'normal.' You will likely not get enough uninterrupted sleep at night so



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you must make a plan to shift your previous routines. You must nap at least once a day, and it is a good plan to 'sleep when the baby sleeps.' Arrange for help with meals, household chores and care of other children. The more you are able to rest and take care of yourself these first weeks, the better you will be able to care for and get to know your new baby and the sooner you will be able to resume your normal routines.

Your Emotions

It is common to feel very tired, a little let down or weepy after the birth, usually on day 3 or 4 postpartum as your mature milk is coming in. This is mostly due to hormonal shifts taking place, combined with sleep deprivation! Plan to have a quiet day, know that these feelings are normal, and will likely pass within 24 hours. However, if you feel overwhelmed, anxious, depressed or unable to cope, call your midwife right away.

Preventing Infections

It is very important to do what you can to prevent infection. Frequent, thorough hand washing is an important, basic way to prevent the transmission of harmful bacteria or yeast. Postpartum moms have an increased chance of developing uterine or breast infections. Phone your midwife with a rise in your temperature above 37.8 C (100F), if your uterus becomes painful/tender to touch, or if your flow develops a strong/bad odour. Possible signs of breast infection (mastitis) include fever, flu-like symptoms, redness or heat over the affected area. Occasionally there will be a temporary rise in a mom's temperature when the milk comes in but this should normalize within 12 hours.

- Hand washing is the best way to prevent infection
- Take your temperature if you feel unwell
- Call your midwife if your temperature is above 37.8 C (100 F)