

Physical postpartum changes

Perineum soreness

The perineum is the area between your vagina and rectum. It stretches during labor and vaginal birth, and it may even tear. It often is sore after you give birth. You may be more sore if you had an episiotomy (a cut made at the opening of the vagina to help the baby out).

What you can do:

- Do Kegel exercises. These strengthen the muscles in the pelvic area, which helps the perineum heal. To do them, squeeze the muscles that you use to stop yourself from urinating. Hold the muscles tight for 10 seconds and then release.
- Put a cold pack on your perineum. Use ice wrapped in a towel. Or you can buy cold packs that you freeze in your freezer.
- Sit on a pillow.
- Soak in a warm bath.
- Wipe from front to back after going to the bathroom. This can help prevent infection as your episiotomy heals.
- Ask your provider about medicine to help ease the pain.

Afterbirth pains

These are cramps that you feel as your uterus shrinks back to its regular size. Right after you give birth, your uterus is round and hard and weighs about 2½ pounds. By about 6 weeks after birth, it weighs only 2 ounces. The cramps should go away in a few days.

What you can do:

Ask your provider about over-the-counter medicine you can take for pain.

After a c-section

A c-section is major surgery, so it may take a while for you to recover. You may be really tired for the first few days or

weeks after a c-section. This is because you lost blood during the surgery. Also, your incision (the cut on your belly) may be sore.

What you can do:

- Ask your provider for pain medicine. Check with him before you take any over-the-counter medicine for pain.
- Ask your partner, family and friends for help with the baby and at home.

Vaginal discharge

After your baby is born, your body gets rid of the blood and tissue that was inside the uterus. This is called vaginal discharge or lochia. For the first few days, it's heavy, bright red and may contain some blood clots. Over time, the flow gets less and lighter in color. You may have discharge for a few weeks, or even for a month or more.

What you can do: Use sanitary pads until the vaginal discharge goes away.

Breast engorgement

This is when your breasts swell as they fill with milk. They may feel tender and sore. Most of the time the discomfort goes away once you start breastfeeding regularly.

What you can do:

- Try not to miss a feeding or go a long time between feedings. Don't skip night feedings.
- Express a small amount of milk with a breast pump or by hand before breastfeeding.



watch & learn

Watch videos on how to have a healthy pregnancy at: marchofdimes.org/videos

March of Dimes materials are for information purposes only and are not to be used as medical advice. Always seek medical advice from your health care provider. Our materials reflect current scientific recommendations at time of publication. Check marchofdimes.org for updated information.

- Take a warm shower or lay warm towels on your breasts. If your engorgement is really painful, put cold packs on your breasts.
- Tell your provider if your breasts stay swollen.

Nipple pain

If you are breastfeeding, you may have nipple pain during the first few days, especially if your nipples crack.

What you can do:

- Use a special cream on the nipples. Ask your provider what kind to use.
- Let your breasts air dry.

Swelling

Lots of women have swelling in their hands, feet and face during pregnancy. It is caused by extra fluids in your body that helped you get ready for labor and birth. It may take time for the swelling to go away after you have your baby.

What you can do:

- Lie on your left side or put your feet up.
- Try to stay cool and wear loose clothes.
- Drink plenty of water.

Hemorrhoids

Hemorrhoids are painful, swollen veins in and around the anus. Lots of women get them during pregnancy. They may get worse after giving birth.

What you can do:

- Soak in a warm bath.
- Use an over-the-counter spray or cream to help relieve pain. Ask your provider which ones are OK to use.
- Eat foods that are high in fiber, such as fruits, vegetables and whole-grain breads and cereals.
- Drink lots of water.
- Try not to strain when you're having a bowel movement.

Constipation

You may have painful gas or trouble having a bowel movement after you give birth.

What you can do:

- Eat foods that are high in fiber.
- Drink lots of water.
- Ask your provider about medicine to take.

Urinary problems

You may feel pain or burning when you urinate. Or you may try to urinate but find that you can't. Sometimes you may not be able to stop urinating. This is called incontinence.

What you can do for pain and burning:

- Drink lots of water.
- Run water in the sink when you go to the bathroom.
- Soak in a warm bath.
- If the pain continues, tell your provider

What you can do for incontinence:

Do Kegel exercises to strengthen your pelvic muscles.

Sweating

This happens a lot to new moms, especially at night. It's caused by all the hormones in your body after pregnancy.

What you can do:

- Sleep on a towel to help keep your sheets and pillow dry.
- Don't use too many blankets or wear warm clothes to bed.

Feeling tired

You may have lost blood during labor and birth. This can make your body tired. And your baby probably doesn't let you sleep all night.

What you can do:

- Sleep when your baby sleeps, even when he naps during the day.
- Eat healthy foods, like fruits, vegetables, whole-grain breads and pasta, and lean meat and chicken. Limit sweets and foods with a lot of fat.
- Ask your partner, family and friends for help with the baby and around the house.

Getting your period again

If you are not breastfeeding, your period may start again 6 to 8 weeks after giving birth. If you are breastfeeding, you may not start again for months. Some women don't have a period again until they stop breastfeeding. Be careful — if you have sex, you can get pregnant even before your period starts again, breastfeeding or not.

Losing weight

Now's a great time to get to a healthy weight, no matter how much you weighed before you got pregnant. You feel better and are less likely to have health conditions, like diabetes and high blood pressure, if you're at a healthy weight. And just in case you get pregnant again, or if you plan to have another baby sometime in the future, it's best to be at a healthy weight before your next pregnancy.

What you can do:

- Talk to your provider about your healthy weight. If you were overweight before pregnancy, you may want to lose more weight than you gained during pregnancy.
- Eat healthy foods. Limit sweets and foods with a lot of fat.
- Drink lots of water.
- Do something active every day. Walking and swimming are great activities for new moms.

- Breastfeed your baby. Breastfeeding helps you burn calories. This can help you lose the weight you gained during pregnancy faster than if you weren't breastfeeding.
- Don't feel badly if you don't lose the weight as quickly as you'd like. It takes some time for your body (and your belly) to get back into shape.

Skin

You may have stretch marks on your belly, thighs, breasts and bottom where your skin stretched during pregnancy.

What you can do: Use creams or lotions on your skin.

Hair

Your hair may have seemed thicker and fuller during pregnancy. After your baby is born, your hair may thin out. You may even lose hair. Hair loss usually stops about 3 to 4 months after your baby's birth.

What you can do:

- Eat lots of fruits and vegetables. These may help protect your hair and help it grow.
- Be gentle with your hair. Don't wear tight ponytails, braids or rollers. These can pull and stress your hair.
- Use the cool setting on your hair dryer.

Getting pregnant

It's possible that you may ovulate (release an egg) before you get your period again. This means you could get pregnant.

What you can do: Use birth control to help make sure you don't get pregnant again until you're ready. If you're breastfeeding, ask your provider about which birth control to use. Not all kinds of birth control are safe to use when breastfeeding.