**Women's Wellness & Research Center**
**Patient & Family Education Unit**
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# Mother and Postpartum Self-Care Basics

## "MOTHERS CARE BECAUSE WE CARE"



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## Dear Mother,

CONGRATULATIONS!

Here are some of the tips that will help build your confidence with Postpartum Self Care. Since your body has just gone through pregnancy and child birth it will need about six weeks to get back to normal.

This guide will help you understand the changes in your body and more importantly help you to take care of yourself.

## Involution of the uterus

Involution is the term used for the decrease in size of the uterus and a return to its normal condition and position.

### Following childbirth:

- The uterus undergoes rapid reduction in size and weight.
- Oxytocin is the hormone responsible for uterine involution and for initiation of the let-down of milk for breastfeeding.
- Breastfeeding stimulates the production of oxytocin which causes the uterus to contract and hasten involution.
- The uterus returns to its non-pregnant size after 5 to 6 weeks.



## After Pain (Pain after delivery)

**Normal delivery** - pain during the postpartum period may be caused by an episiotomy, laceration, perineal trauma, incisions, uterine contraction after birth, hemorrhoids and breast engorgement.

**After caesarean birth** - pain may be related to an incision and intestinal gas. A discomfort similar to menstrual cramps (uterine contraction) will continue after delivery as part of the involution process.

Lying flat on your abdomen (5 to 10 minutes) may relieve pain and discomfort. Gas pain can be relieved by ambulation, rocking in a rocking chair, and avoiding gas forming foods and carbonated beverages.

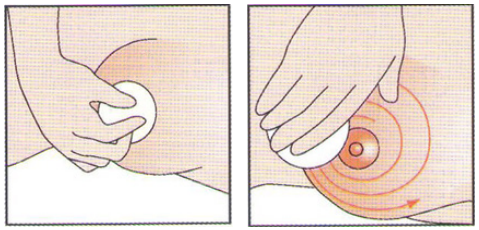
**Note:**
If pain persists and cannot be tolerated, analgesic can be taken as per your doctor's instruction.

## Breast Care

### How to do that:

Washing your hands is the most important action you can do before feeding the baby. It will prevent your baby and your breast from getting any infections.

- The breast and nipples should be cleansed with warm tap water.
- Avoid using soap because it removes the oils provided by the body.
- Wear a supportive nursing bra for 24 hours a day (to help with comfort).
- Wear and change breast pads frequently when breast milk leaking occurs.



### Relieving Breast Engorgement

About 3 to 4 days after delivery, milk comes into the breast under the influence of the hormone called prolactin. Your breast may become distended, engorged, painful and shiny. They may be hard and sensitive to touch. At first this is due to venous congestion, but later the condition is intensified by the accumulating milk.

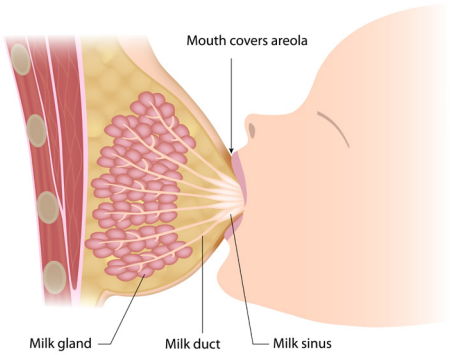
### How to prevent this:

- Early and frequent breastfeeding (every two hours or as per your baby's demand)
- Application of a warm compress to the affected breast.
- Apply ice packs between feeding (it constricts the circulation and decreases swelling and pain).
- Application of gentle massage causes the release of the oxytocin and increases the flow of the milk.
- Manual or electric breast pump will help to relieve engorgement.

### Relieving Sore Nipple:

Shortly after feeding begins, you may experience the pain from the cracked or sore nipple.

- Ensure you are practicing the correct latch-on technique.






## Perineal Care – The healing process

The perineum is tender even without an episiotomy because of the tremendous amount of stretching after the birth of the baby.

Gentle perineal cleansing is postpartum (after delivery) comfort measure.

### How to do this:

- Wash hands before and after to prevent infection.
- Remove the soiled perineal pad from front to back then discard.
- Wash the perineum with warm water. (Option - you may use a mild soap ).
- Use tissue to pat dry from front to back.
- Apply a fresh perineal pad from front to back and secure with panty.

### Perineal care is continued for as long as vaginal discharge persists.

- If with a episiotomy will heal in 5 to 6 weeks if not infected.
- If there is no episiotomy, the perineum regains its muscle tone in 2 to 3 weeks.
- To relieve pain and discomfort, apply analgesic ointment as per your doctors instruction.

**Note:**
Your stitches should dissolve on their own, if not make an appointment with your doctor for follow up care.

## Bleeding

After the birth of the baby, you will have vaginal discharge that will change in color and duration from:

- Red to pinkish = 1 to 3 days
- Pinkish to brown = 3 to 10 days
- Yellowish to white = 10 to 14 days

The more active you are, the more you may experience vaginal bleeding. Try not to lift anything heavier than the baby. Go up and down the stairs slowly. A mother who has had a caesarian delivery will have less vaginal discharge (bleeding) during the first 24 hours. Breastfeeding mothers have less vaginal discharge because of the release of the oxytocin during feeding.

**Note:**
If heavy bleeding (soaking a sanitary pad every one hour) continues, inform your doctor or go to the nearest hospital.

## Hemorrhoids

This is a common problem caused by the pressure exerted by the presenting part during labor and delivery, though it gradually shrink and regresses, it may be most painful in 2 to 3 days after delivery.

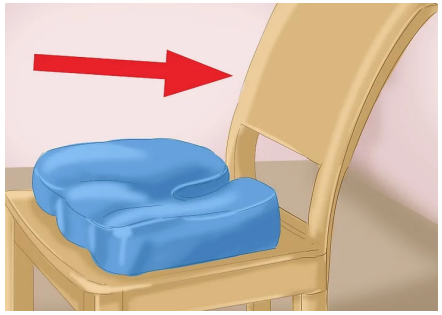
**Here are some of things you can do to create comfort:**

- Sitz bath 10 to 15 minutes with warm water twice a day.
- Loosened perineal pads and lying on the side while in bed.
- Prevent constipation by eating food rich in fiber.
- Avoid straining during bowel movement.
- Apply anti-hemorrhoid cream as per doctor's advice



## Sitting

After delivery, you may find it difficult and uncomfortable to sit due to perineal episiotomy, laceration, perineal trauma, and hemorrhoids.



**To relieve pain and discomfort, try to:**

- Tighten your buttocks together while sitting or getting up from a seated position to help ease discomfort from your stitches.
- Maintain the tension briefly after sitting down, and then relax. This action minimizes pressure on the perineum and promotes comfort.
- If you are unable to splint the perineal area, you can manually squeeze your buttocks together as you sit.
- Use ring pillow or rolled blanket – this serve as a cushion to support perineum while sitting.

## Early Ambulation

Unless contraindicated, early ambulation is encouraged to be out of bed within 4-8 hours after delivery.

**How does early ambulation help:**

- It stimulates blood circulation and reduces the risk of thrombophlebitis (inflammation of the vein in the calf, thigh or pelvis )
- Bowel function is stimulated, constipation and abdominal distention is prevented.

The need to increase activity should be done gradually. Avoid strenuous activity lifting and climbing of stairs until six weeks postpartum.

## Bowel Elimination

You may be unable to move bowel for 2-3 days after delivery. Constipation may persist as a problem after delivery due to:

- Effect of anesthesia
- Stretched abdominal muscle tone
- Perineum maybe sore from episiotomy or hemorrhoids

### What to do:

- Drink lots of fluids
- Early ambulation
- Eat foods high in fibers

## DIET AND NUTRITION



**Note:**
If the above measures fail, a stool softener may help the problem as per your doctor's instruction.

A nursing mother must maintain a balanced nutritional regimen to provide optional nutrition for the baby. An increase of 500 calories per day is needed from the basic food groups:

- Meat, fish, poultry, beans and nuts
- Vegetables and fruits
- Milk and various dairy products
- Bread and cereals



Equally important, a fluid intake of 6-8 glasses of fluid per day is essential.

"You have to remember that whatever food you take will directly affect your breastmilk, as the food is tasted in the breastmilk from 6-24 hours after consumption".

## Rest and Sleep

After the physical and emotional stress of labor and delivery, you will have the feeling of fatigue and exhaustion. Adequate rest is important to recovery.

- Rest and sleep whenever possible.
- You may nap during the day when the baby sleeps.

**Note:**
Insufficient rest contributes to irritability and decrease of tolerance to stress may inhibit effective nursing.

## Return of Ovulation and Menstruation

Ovulation resumes in approximately 12-18 weeks. Menstrual cycles in the nursing mothers begin in about 6- 12 weeks. If you are lactating, menstruation resumes within 12 weeks, although some may not resume their periods until they discontinue breastfeeding.

**Note:**
A woman may ovulate without menstruation. The absence of menstrual flow does not mean that the woman cannot get pregnant.

## Working out Through "Emotional Changes"

The transition to motherhood brings many hormonal changes and body image.

- Transient emotional changes or baby blues last about 3-6 days after the baby is born. When it develops after delivery, it is called "postpartum blues", this is normal.
- You may feel depress, unhappy, may cry for no apparent reason. Irritable, anxiety, fear and at time unable to sleep.
- To avoid feeling overwhelmed, keep life simple and unscheduled until things start to feel more comfortable.
- Verbalizing emotional changes will be helpful to express your feeling to your new role and potential adaptation.

**Note:**
If there are other changes in your normal emotions, see your doctor.

## Exercise and Activity

The week after giving birth is filled with changes. Your family has changed with the arrival of your baby. You have worked hard to find a healthy balance during your pregnancy and diligently prepared for labor, birth and your baby. But there is something else that requires some planning though understanding. That is getting ready to cope and be able to function effortless.

### How will you do that:

Simple exercise may begin soon after birth such as kegel, abdominal and leg rolls.

### Exercise will help you:

- Improve your altered body image and your self-image.
- Give you feeling of well-being
- Help you cope with stress of motherhood.
- Increase energy level and improves vascular endurance.



### 1. Pelvic Floor Exercise (Kegel Exercise)

- Tighten your pelvic floor muscle
- Hold the contraction of pelvic floor contraction for five seconds and then relax for five seconds.
- Repeat 10 times, 3 times a day (morning, afternoon, and night).

**Note:**
Make sure your bladder is empty, do it while sitting or lying down .

### 2. Firming the Abdomen (Abdominal Breathing Exercise)

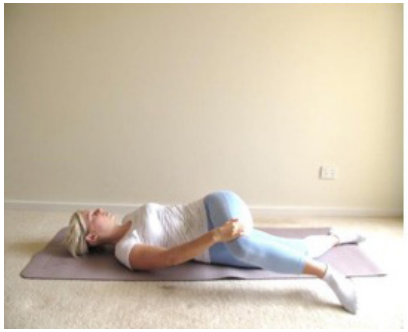
- Lie on your back with knees bent.
- Inhale deeply through the nose, keeping a stationary possible and allowing the abdomen to expand up.
- Exhale slowly but forcefully while contracting the abdominal muscles.
- Hold for about 3 to 5 seconds while exhaling. Relax...
- Begin with two repetitions, gradually progressing to ten.



### 3. Leg Roll Exercise

- Lie on your back with your leg straight.
- Keeping shoulder flat, slowly and smoothly lift the leg and while keeping it straight, roll it over to touch the right side of the bed and return to starting position.
- Repeat using the right leg to touch the left side of the bed. Relax...
- Begin with two repetitions, gradually progressing to ten.





**Note:**
After a caesarean birth, abdominal exercise should be postponed for six weeks. For normal delivery, you should be able to exercise within 4 weeks.

## Seeing Your Doctor Again

To keep track of your healthy postpartum period, it is important that you keep your appointment and see your doctor for a follow-up visit.



## Key Safety Tips for Night-Time Breastfeeding and Baby Sleep

### Baby Safety During Feeding

Breastfeeding at night is normal, but it is important to keep your baby safe, especially when you feel very tired or sleepy.

- **Before you start feeding**, check how tired you feel.
- **If you think you may fall asleep, take extra care to make the environment safer by following these steps:**
  - Try to sit up while breastfeeding rather than lying down in bed, to reduce the chance of falling asleep.
  - Turn on a light or keep the room well-lit to help you stay awake during feeding.
  - Avoid feeding your baby on sofas, couches, armchairs, or recliners, as you may fall asleep more easily, which can make your baby's breathing unsafe.
  - Ask your partner or another adult to stay with you during feeding, so they can help keep you awake or place the baby in a cot or bassinet if you fall asleep.
  - If you are alone, you may set a timer or alarm every few minutes to help

you stay awake or remind you to place your baby back in their cot or bassinet.

- **After feeding (follow these safe sleep practices):**
  - Always put your baby to sleep on their back in a cot or bassinet. This helps your baby breathe safely and reduces the risk of suffocation and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).
  - Do not sleep with your baby in your bed, as this can increase the risk of your baby's breathing becoming unsafe.
  - Keep your baby's cot or bassinet close to your bed for easier care and safer night-time feeding.
  - Use a firm, flat mattress in the baby cot or bassinet, and keep it free from pillows, blankets, and stuffed toys.



- Keep the baby cot away from curtains, cords, wires, or anything hanging.

## Remember!

**Do not hesitate to see your doctor or visits the nearest hospital if you have the following:**

- Fever above 100.4°F (38°C)
- Foul smelling vaginal discharge
- Incision (caesarean/episiotomy) pain - observe for redness /swelling /bluish discoloration/ discharge/skin separation)
- Breast pain with redness and swelling
- Burning sensation during urination

## Notes



## Notes