

Recovery After Giving Birth

Caring for a new baby is one of the most joyous and challenging times in a woman's life. At the same time, new mothers must take special care of their bodies after giving birth and while breastfeeding.

Getting Rest

The first few days at home after giving birth are days for physical and emotional rest and recuperation. You need to focus your energy on yourself and on getting to know your new baby. Even though you may be very excited and have requests for lots of visits from family and friends, try to get as much rest as possible.

Do not expect to keep your house perfect. You may find that all you can do is eat, sleep and care for your baby. That is perfectly OK. Learn to pace yourself from the first day that you arrive back home. Try to lie down or nap while the baby naps. Do not try to do too much around the house. Allow others to help you, and do not be afraid to ask for help with cleaning, laundry, meals or with caring for the baby.

Physical Changes

After the birth of your baby, your doctor will talk with you about things you will experience as your body starts to recover:

- You will have spotting or bleeding off and on for up to six weeks.
- You might have swelling in your legs and feet. Swelling can be reduced by keeping your feet elevated.
- You might feel constipated. Try to drink plenty of water and eat fiber, fruits and vegetables.
- Menstrual-like cramping is common, especially if you are breastfeeding. Your breast milk will come in within three to six days after your delivery. Your breasts might feel full, tender or uncomfortable. Also, even if you are not breastfeeding, you can have milk leaking from your nipples.
- Follow your doctor's instructions on how much activity (like climbing stairs or walking) you can do over the next few weeks.
- Doctors usually recommend that you abstain from sexual intercourse for four to six weeks after giving birth.

Regaining a Healthy Weight and Shape

Both pregnancy and labor affect a woman's body. If you are trying to lose some pregnancy weight, make sure you do it in a healthy way. Consult your doctor before you start any type of diet or exercise plan.

If you want to diet and are breastfeeding, it is best to wait until your baby is at least two months old. During those first two months, your body needs to recover from childbirth and establish a good milk supply. Then when you start to lose weight, try not to lose too much too quickly. This can be harmful to the baby because environmental toxins that are stored in your body fat can be released into your breast milk. Losing about

one pound per week (no more than four pounds per month) has been found to be a safe amount and will not affect your milk supply or the baby's growth.

You can safely lose weight by consuming at least 1,800 calories per day with a well-balanced, nutritious diet that includes foods rich in calcium, zinc, magnesium, vitamin B6 and folic acid. Diets in which you consume less than 1,500 calories per day are not recommended at any point during breastfeeding. This can put you at risk for a nutritional deficiency, lower your energy level and weaken your resistance to illness.

Dealing With Depression

In addition to the physical changes, you may feel sad or have the "baby blues." This is normal following childbirth. Hormone changes, anxiety about caring for the baby and a lack of sleep affect emotions. Between 50 and 75% of new mothers report feeling a little sad or depressed after giving birth.

Be patient with yourself. These feelings are normal and should get better over time. Be aware of your feelings, and talk with your family, friends and your doctor. Call your doctor right away if you are extremely sad or are unable to care for yourself or your baby. You might have a serious condition called post-partum depression.

Signs of postpartum depression include:

- Feeling restless or irritable
- Feeling sad, depressed or crying a lot
- Having no energy
- Having headaches, chest pains, heart palpitations (the heart beats quickly and feels like it is skipping beats), numbness or hyperventilation (fast and shallow breathing)
- Feeling very tired or not being able to sleep
- Weight loss and a loss of appetite
- Overeating and weight gain
- Trouble focusing, remembering or making decisions
- Being overly worried about the baby
- Not having any interest in the baby
- Feeling worthless and guilty
- Being afraid of hurting the baby or yourself
- Lack of interest in activities that previously brought pleasure.

Postpartum depression can be successfully treated with medicine and/or therapy. Your doctor can help you feel better and get you back to enjoying your new baby.

Resources

- WomensHealth.gov: www.womenshealth.gov
- U.S. Department of Health & Human Services: www.hhs.gov

Here when you need us.

Call: 844-207-5465

Online: guidanceresources.com

App: GuidanceNowSM

Web ID: LivingME

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