

## Postpartum Care

by Mary Gibbons

After the baby is born it is important to take care of yourself! For the first week only take care of your needs and the babies needs. Make sure that you eat well and get plenty of rest.

### Bleeding

The bleeding after birth is called lochia. It can last up to 6 weeks. It will start off being heavy and bright red, and diminish to light pink or brown spotting. If you soak more than 2 pads in half an hour on the first day call your midwife or doctor. After 24 hours you shouldn't soak more than 1 pad an hour. If your bladder is full your bleeding will be heavier. It is normal to have some clotting. If your bleeding starts to slow, and then begins again it is a sign that you are overdoing it.

### Shaking

It is normal to feel shaky or cold after the baby is born for up to a few hours. It is from the hormones and the work of labor.

### After pains

Some women feel cramping or contractions after the birth. This can last for up to a week. The more children that you have the worse these pains will be. Your uterus in contracting to control bleeding and return to a normal size.

### Taking care of stitches in the perineum

If you had any tearing and stitches you will be sore. You can use an ice pack for 20 minutes out of every hour to bring down the swelling and bruising. When you urinate you may want to use a peri bottle to squirt water over yourself so that it doesn't burn. You can also lean forward. Most women find it comforting to use a sitz bath made with Epsom salts and/or herbs.

### Hemorrhoids

These are common after birth. A sitz bath will help with these also. Avoid constipation by eating and drinking well.

### Breast care

Sometimes the breast can get hard and swollen when the milk first comes in. You may take a warm shower and express a little bit of the milk. Use breast pads if your are leaking. Do not use plastic backed pads, as they increase infections. Make sure to change your bra or pad when it becomes wet. If you are feeling a let down, you can stop the leaking by pressing on your nipples with your hands or crossing your arms. If your breast becomes red, hot, or painful you may be getting a breast infection. Go to bed, use a heating pad, and nurse as often as possible. Call your midwife or doctor. This can happen if you are not well rested.

### Postpartum depression

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Make sure that you are eating well and resting. It is helpful to get out into direct sunlight everyday. It is normal to feel some baby blues. This is because of the increased hormone levels that occur during pregnancy. Some signs of the "baby blues" are crying for no reason, trouble sleeping, feeling overwhelmed and wondering if you are a good mom. If your mood changes last more than 2 weeks you may have postpartum depression. Some of the signs of postpartum depression are loss of appetite, unable to sleep, no interest in sex, no joy from activities you used to enjoy, severe mood swings, trouble bonding with the baby, withdrawing from loved ones, wanting to hurt yourself or the baby. You are at more of a risk for postpartum depression if you have a history of depression, stress, lack of support, or a sick baby. If you are having extreme mood swings or feel anger or apathy toward the baby seek help immediately. Ask that you not be left alone.

### Exercise

You can start doing kegels immediately. After your bleeding stops you can start walking. After 6 weeks you can slowly start exercising again.

### Intimacy

After your bleeding has stopped for a few days you can make love again. If you start to spot wait for a few more days. If you had stitches you should wait until they have been checked and your midwife or doctor okays it.