

Postpartum Care After a Vaginal Delivery

Congratulations on the delivery of your baby! Here are some helpful hints to help you recover. Vaginal soreness, whether you had an episiotomy or a vaginal tear, can last several weeks. You can promote healing using the following Perineum Care Methods:

- Soothe the wound with ice packs wrapped in a towel or apply witch hazel compresses to the area.
- Keep the wound clean – use your peri-bottle filled with warm water to rinse the tissue from the vaginal opening to the anus after using the toilet. Soak in a warm tub as needed or every time you have a bowel movement.
- Stop the burn when you urinate – sit over the toilet and lean forward (so the urine will squirt forward instead of backward onto your stitches) while squirting the peri bottle to dilute the urine.
- Passing a bowel movement – if the pain of passing a bowel movement is too painful on its own, with your hand you can push on the stitches with a warm cloth while passing a bowel movement.
- Be sure to clean the area afterward with your peri-bottle and warm water.
- Sit down carefully – squeeze your buttocks together when sitting. You may prefer to use a donut shaped pillow if you are uncomfortable.
- Do Kegel exercises (contracting and relaxing the vaginal muscles) to tone the pelvic floor. Tighten your vagina for 5 seconds and relax. Do this about 4 to 5 times in a row and repeat throughout the day.
- Look for signs of infection – such as increased pain and redness along the scar; pus-like or foul-smelling discharge from the scar or swelling of the wound. This needs the attention of a doctor or midwife as soon as possible.
- Vaginal Discharge – for the first few days, bleeding occurs like a regular menstrual period with small gushing episodes when you stand up. This will taper off to a brown or pink discharge, then yellow and then white discharge. This may last for 6 weeks. **Do not use tampons.**

Useful information:

- Uterine contractions and tightening may occur after your delivery, especially if you are breastfeeding. This is normal.
- If you have a fever or your abdomen is painful to the touch, call your doctor or midwife.

- Urination may be painful for a few days but call your doctor or midwife if you don't think that you are emptying your bladder. For example, if you are dribbling urine or you have an increased urge to urinate often.
- Leaking urine when you cough or sneeze – this is common so do your Kegel exercises and empty your bladder often. Involuntary leaking of urine usually resolves about 3 months after the delivery. Call your doctor or midwife if it doesn't resolve by then. Also mention this problem if it is still present at your 4-6 week check up.
- Hemorrhoids – these are swollen sore bumps on your anus. They may cause pain when you pass a bowel movement. These are treated with hemorrhoid cream, or cold witch hazel. After each bowel movement, clean the area with your peri-bottle and dry with a tissue. Hemorrhoids will shrink with time now that the pregnant uterus is no longer pushing on the veins that cause hemorrhoids. To shrink hemorrhoids faster, keep your bowel movements loose with high fiber foods and plenty of fluids, especially water. Keep active to keep bowels moving.
- Sore breasts – your breasts will become heavy and swollen in the first 5 days after delivery. If you are breastfeeding, wearing a firm supportive bra and feeding the baby are the best ways to relieve discomfort. Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or Ibuprofen (Advil®) will help with pain.
- For episiotomy pain you may continue with Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or Ibuprofen (Advil®). If you require stronger pain medications contact your doctor or midwife as medications can affect breastfeeding.

Call Your Doctor/Midwife If:

- You notice redness, extreme breast tenderness or fever.
- You soak a menstrual pad every hour for more than 2 hours.
- The vaginal discharge has a foul odor.
- You pass clumps of blood larger than a golf ball.
- You have a fever (temperature greater than 38°C or 100°F).

Commonly Asked Questions:

Q: When do I see my doctor or midwife again?

A: You must see your doctor or midwife for your 4-6 week check up and see your baby's doctor in 2-3 days. If you delivered by a midwife, they will come to your home a few days after delivery to assess both you and the baby.

Q: When can I resume sexual intercourse?

A: It is recommended to avoid having sexual intercourse until you see your doctor for the post partum check-up. Many doctors recommend waiting six weeks before resuming sexual intercourse. But don't give up on intimacy. Spend time with your partner, even if it is just a few minutes in the morning or after the baby goes to sleep at night. You should not be having intercourse if you have had a vulvar tear or episiotomy until after your 6 week check-up.

Q: Can I get pregnant now?

A: Yes – even if you are breastfeeding you can get pregnant and even before your 6 week check-up. Therefore, always consider a birth control method such as a

condom. Remember to discuss your birth control methods with your doctor or midwife.

Q: What activities can I do?

A: You can resume your daily activities as soon as you get home. However, realize that you will be tired and you may be sore. Take frequent rests (try to sleep when the baby sleeps). Only drive when you can sit comfortably and can flex and straighten your legs quickly and without pain in the event that you may need to brake quickly.