

Prenatal Education

Key Messages for Ontario



Recovery after Birth

Key Messages

After you give birth, your body undergoes a number of normal changes.

It will take time for your body to return to its normal state. It is important to be patient and have realistic expectations of what your body will look like and what it will do after the birth.

Whether you had a vaginal or caesarean birth, you can expect the following changes:

- ▶ Your uterus contracts and returns to its almost pre-pregnant size and shape.
- ▶ The lining of your uterus is shed as a bloody discharge called lochia. This will lighten in colour and decrease in amount over the next six weeks.
- ▶ Breastmilk production will gradually increase as it changes from colostrum to mature breastmilk.
- ▶ If you had a vaginal birth, your perineum (i.e., the area between the vagina and anus) gradually becomes less swollen and tender. If you had stitches, the area heals, and the stitches dissolve.
- ▶ If you had a caesarean birth, the incision heals and the stitches inside dissolve. If your skin was closed with staples, they will be removed by your health care provider. If your skin was closed with stitched, the stitches will dissolve.
- ▶ Your hormone levels stabilize.

Plan to see your health care provider within six weeks after the birth to make sure that your body has healed well.

If you have any concerns about your health before your six-week visit, you can contact your health care provider earlier or speak with a public health nurse. If you have not talked about resuming sex and your options for birth control, you may want to have this discussion during your six-week visit.

If you have a midwife, they will visit you and your baby several times during the first week and then regularly until six weeks after the birth.

You may experience some discomforts as your body recovers from the birth.

In the postpartum period, you may experience some discomfort or concerns including:

- ▶ Breast tenderness as your milk comes in.
- ▶ Abdominal cramps as your uterus returns to its normal shape and size.
- ▶ Lochia (i.e., the vaginal discharge which can last up to six weeks).
- ▶ Swollen, bruised, or tender perineum especially if you had a tear or an episiotomy (i.e., a cut or incision between the vagina and anus at the time of the birth).
- ▶ Pain at the incision site if you had a caesarean birth.
- ▶ Trouble urinating or having a bowel movement.
- ▶ Feeling tired and having a difficult time getting enough rest.
- ▶ Changing emotions because of fatigue and changing hormone levels. Postpartum blues (i.e., baby blues) are experienced by four out of five women.

Contact your health care provider if:

- ▶ You pass blood clots larger than a plum, soak a pad an hour, or you think you are bleeding more than what is normal.
- ▶ The caesarean incision or the stitches in your perineum start to open.
- ▶ You have yellow or greenish discharge from your stitches or vagina.
- ▶ You have foul-smelling vaginal discharge.
- ▶ You don't think the tissues are healing properly.
- ▶ You have a fever greater than 38.0 Celsius or 100.4 Fahrenheit.
- ▶ You have flu-like symptoms.
- ▶ You have pain that is not relieved by your pain medication.
- ▶ You have a severe headache that is not better after taking pain medication.
- ▶ You have spots or stars before your eyes, dizziness, and/or sharp upper abdominal pain.
- ▶ One or both of your legs becomes very painful and swollen.
- ▶ You cannot urinate or are having burning or pain when you urinate.
- ▶ You cannot have a bowel movement.
- ▶ You have a red, hot, or swollen breast, or a sore, hard, red or painful area on the breast.
- ▶ The postpartum blues last longer than two weeks.

If you are not able to speak with your health care provider, call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 to speak to a Registered Nurse. This service is available in English and French with translators available for other languages. It is available 24 hours a day and seven days a week.

Call 911 if you have trouble breathing, shortness of breath, chest pain, or a racing or irregular heart rate.

Learn more about recovery after birth.

You can find out more about recovery after birth from the following resources. For information about postpartum mental health concerns see the Mental Health Key Messages.

- ▶ Your health care provider
- ▶ Your local public health unit 1-866-532-3161
- ▶ Prenatal classes
- ▶ Peel Public Health: Health After Pregnancy
www.peelregion.ca/health/family-health/after-pregnancy
- ▶ Healthline: Postpartum Care
www.healthline.com/health/postpartum-care#Definition1
- ▶ oMama
www.omama.com