

Postpartum

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/postpartum>

Postpartum starts immediately after childbirth and generally lasts six to eight weeks. Your body goes through many physical and emotional changes during this time, with some symptoms lasting months after you give birth. Getting rest, allowing your body time to heal and eating nutritious foods can help you recover from childbirth.

The Physical and Emotional Changes That Occur During the Postpartum Period

Many physical and emotional symptoms occur during the postpartum period. Postpartum is the first six to eight weeks after childbirth.

What Does Postpartum Mean?

Postpartum (or postnatal) refers to the period after childbirth. Most often, the postpartum period is the first six to eight weeks after delivery, or until your body returns to its pre-pregnancy state. But the symptoms and changes that occur during the postpartum period can last far beyond eight weeks.

Major body and life changes are happening at the same time during the postpartum period. Some changes are physical — for example, breast engorgement and vaginal bleeding. Other changes occur due to changing hormones. The bottom line is, giving birth is a major physical and emotional challenge. Being a caregiver and adjusting to life with an infant during the postpartum period is also incredibly demanding.

Pay attention to how you feel after giving birth and let your healthcare provider know if something feels off. Just because you gave birth doesn't mean your care ends or that your health isn't important. You should try prioritizing resting and taking care of your health in addition to caring for your baby.

Your healthcare provider will schedule postpartum checkups with you so they can continue to monitor your recovery and healing. It's important to attend these appointments because this is where your provider can identify potential complications. This is also a time when you can ask questions and have honest conversations about your healing.

Postpartum Recovery Timeline

Your recovery — like your pregnancy — is unique to you. There isn't a one-size-fits-all timeline to postpartum. But there's a general timeline of what you can expect.

Some of the things you can expect in the hours and days immediately after birth are:

- **Your uterus needs to shrink back** to its usual size. This causes cramps and vaginal bleeding. Your provider may even massage your uterus through your belly to help it get smaller.
 - **Hormonal shifts.** This can cause symptoms like hot flashes, changes to your mood and headaches.
 - **Breast engorgement.** Your breasts will produce milk, and even if you choose not to breastfeed, you'll have painful and swollen breasts.
 - **Perineal soreness.** Pain in the space between your vagina and anus (perineum) is common after vaginal birth. C-section births cause soreness around the incision.
 - **Swelling from extra fluids.** Typically normal and resolves within a week. Chest pain and trouble breathing may indicate a more serious problem.
 - **Fatigue.** Exhaustion from labor and caring for a newborn is expected. Rest is key.
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What Are the Three Stages of Postpartum?

Healthcare providers classify postpartum into three phases:

1. **Acute phase:** First 6 to 12 hours after birth. Most medical emergencies like eclampsia or hemorrhage occur in this stage.
 2. **Subacute phase:** Lasts about 2 to 6 weeks. Your body continues to heal, and concerns like cardiomyopathy or postpartum depression may appear.
 3. **Delayed phase:** From 6 weeks to 6 months postpartum. Most healing is complete, but you may still experience issues like pelvic floor dysfunction.
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What Are Normal Symptoms of Postpartum?

Physical symptoms:

- **Perineal pain**
- **Vaginal discharge (lochia)**
- **Uterus involution (shrinking)**
- **Breast engorgement and nipple pain**
- **Sweating**
- **Constipation and hemorrhoids**
- **C-section incision healing**
- **Hair loss**

Emotional symptoms:

- **Baby blues:** Sadness and mood swings that resolve in a few weeks.
 - **Postpartum depression:** Persistent sadness needing medical attention.
 - **Postpartum anxiety:** Excessive worrying, often requiring therapy or medication.
 - **Body image and weight loss concerns**
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What Are Complications That Can Occur During the Postpartum Period?

Watch for signs of:

- Postpartum hemorrhage
- Postpartum preeclampsia

- Deep vein thrombosis (DVT)
 - Pulmonary embolism
 - Postpartum rage or psychosis
 - Sepsis
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Ways to Take Care of Yourself After Having a Baby

- **Rest:** Prioritize sleep and ask for help.
 - **Nutrition:** Hydrate and eat well.
 - **Perineal care:** Use peri bottles, witch hazel pads, and cold compresses.
 - **Activity:** Avoid strenuous workouts. Start with gentle movement.
 - **Mental health:** Don't hesitate to talk to someone or get professional support.
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When Should I Contact My Healthcare Provider?

Call your provider if you notice:

- Heavy bleeding (filling a pad each hour)
- Passing multiple large clots
- Fever over 101°F (38°C)
- New or increasing pain
- Foul-smelling discharge
- Swollen, painful legs

- Incision pus or bleeding
- Dizziness, blurred vision
- Persistent headache
- Chest pain or shortness of breath

The postpartum period is one of adjustment and transition. It's normal to feel overwhelmed or lonely. Even if it seems like everyone talks about pregnancy, postpartum care is just as important. Be kind to yourself, ask for support, and attend all your checkups. Your health matters.