**Body changes after birth**

Your body continues to change after your baby is born. Some changes are physical and others are emotional. It can take 4 to 6 weeks or more before you feel like yourself again. Be realistic about what your body will look like and what you will be able to do after giving birth.

**Medical follow-ups after childbirth**

See your health care provider 2 to 6 weeks after you give birth to make sure your body is recovering. If you have questions or concerns before your appointment, contact your health care provider or a public health nurse. If you have a midwife, they will visit you the week after you deliver. They will continue to see you and your baby regularly for 6 weeks.

Changes to your body

This chart will help you understand the changes your body will go through after you give birth.

Bleeding and vaginal discharge

* You will have vaginal bleeding and discharge that can last up to 6 weeks. This happens with both a caesarean birth or a vaginal birth

**First few days:**

* heavy, red, bloody discharge
* you may notice small clots

**After a few days:**

* decreases and changes to pink or brown

**After 10 days:**

* changes in colour to pink and then to white or yellow

*What can I do?*

* Use pads (not a tampon or menstrual cup)
* Change your pad every time you go to the bathroom (at least every 4 hours)
* Rinse your perineum (between your vagina and anus) with warm water using a squeeze bottle
* Don't rinse inside your vagina (douche)

*When should I contact my health care provider?*

If you experience:

* heavy bleeding or discharge (1 soaked pad in an hour, twice in a row)
* blood clots larger than a plum or an egg
* discharge that smells bad
* ongoing stomach pain
* a fever:
  + 38.0°C or higher taken by ear
  + 37.6°C or higher taken by mouth or under armpit

Changes to your perineum (area between your vagina and anus)

* Stretching and tearing is very common. You may have had an episiotomy
* You may feel bruising, swelling and pain that slowly decreases
* If you had stitches, they will dissolve within 2 to 4 weeks (you may find pieces of them on your pad or underwear)
* Your vulva (outer part of your vagina) may look different and seem more open

*What can I do?*

* Apply a cold pack or ice (wrapped in a towel) to your perineum for 15 to 20 minutes every hour for the first 24 hours
* Use a squeeze bottle to rinse your perineum with warm water when you go to the bathroom
* Wipe from front to back after going to the bathroom
* Soak your perineum in a few inches of warm water each day
* Use a sitz (warm, shallow) bath after a bowel movement
* Change your pad every time you go to the bathroom (at least every 4 hours)
* Sit on a pillow or donut shaped cushion
* Take pain medication as directed by your health care provider
* Try Kegel exercises to strengthen your pelvic floor muscles

*When should I contact my health care provider?*

If you feel you are not healing or you have:

* new or severe pain, bleeding or discharge
* yellow or greenish discharge from your stitches or vagina
* foul-smelling discharge
* fever
* flu-like symptoms
* pain that does not go away with pain medication

Afterpains and cramps

You will have menstrual-like cramps, known as afterpains. These pains help your uterus go back to its original shape and size within about 6 weeks. These can:

* last between a few days to a week after birth
* be stronger if you breastfeed
* feel more intense if this was not your first baby

*What can I do?*

* Take pain medication as directed by your health care provider
* Apply a warm compress to your stomach
* Go to the bathroom often

*When should I contact my health care provider?*

If you experience:

* new or worse pain in your stomach
* new or severe bleeding or discharge
* pain that does not go away with pain medication

Breast changes

As your breasts fill with milk, they may feel:

* swollen
* warm
* tender
* sore

This often lasts between 2 to 5 days after birth. Some people don't experience any discomfort.

If your breasts become engorged (too much milk) they may feel:

* hard
* warm
* swollen
* throbbing

The skin may look tight, shiny and your nipple may look flat.

This can last between 24 to 48 hours.

*What can I do?*

* Wear a supportive, loose-fitting bra
* Wear nursing pads in your bra if you are leaking
* If your breasts are engorged, express (squeeze) a small amount of milk a few times a day to release pressure
* Apply a cold compress for 10 to 15 minutes every couple of hours
* Take pain medications as directed by your health care provider

If you are breastfeeding:

* do it often (8 times every 24 hours)
* follow the guidance above
* express (squeeze) a small amount of milk by hand or with a breast pump before you breastfeed if your breasts are engorged
* take a warm shower or apply a warm, moist towel on your breasts to help with milk flow before breastfeeding

If you are formula feeding:

* the pain and tenderness usually improve in a few days
* do not apply warm compresses on your breasts

*When should I contact my health care provider?*

If you experience:

* swollen, red, hot and painful breasts for more than 48 hours
* a sore, hard, red, painful area on your breast
* painful or cracked nipples, which could be a sign your baby is not latching properly
* a fever:
  + 38.0°C or higher taken by ear
  + 37.6°C or higher taken by mouth or under the armpit

Constipation and changes in your bowel movements (pooping)

Constipation is common after giving birth. Bowel movements can be painful and hard to pass. They may happen up to:

* 2 to 3 days after a vaginal birth
* 3 to 5 days after a caesarean birth

*What can I do?*

* Drink lots of water – your urine should be pale yellow or clear
* Go to the bathroom as soon as you feel the need
* Slowly eat more fruits, vegetables and whole grains, which contain fibre
* Gradually increase your physical activity
* Talk to your health care provider about medication for constipation

*When should I contact my health care provider?*

If you experience:

* ongoing constipation beyond the normal time frame

You may need a stool softener or other medication. Take them as directed by your health care provider. If they don't work, follow up with your health care provider.

Hemorrhoids (veins around your anus bulge)

Hemorrhoids are caused from pregnancy and pushing during birth and usually goes away after a few weeks. Symptoms include:

* itching
* bleeding
* pain

*What can I do?*

* Move often and try not to stand or sit for long periods
* Drink lots of water
* Avoid straining when you have a bowel movement
* Clean often from front to back
* Try baby wipes or hemorrhoid pads instead of toilet paper
* Slowly eat more fruits, vegetables and whole grains, which contain fibre
* Apply a cold pack or ice for 10 to 20 minutes a few times each day
* Take hemorrhoid and pain medications as directed by your health care provider

*When should I contact my health care provider?*

If you experience:

* ongoing pain
* hemorrhoids that don't go away after a few weeks

Changes to urination (peeing)

* Difficulty when trying to pee
* Discomfort, stinging, burning and problems when you pee
* Leaking that can last for a few weeks
* Peeing more than normal

*What can I do?*

* Use a squeeze bottle to rinse your perineum with warm water when you go to the bathroom
* Drink lots of water
* Run water in the sink or try peeing in the shower to help encourage your body to pee
* Do Kegel exercises to strengthen your pelvic floor muscles
* Take pain medications as directed by your health care provider

*When should I contact my health care provider?*

If you experience:

* ongoing pain when peeing
* pain in your bladder (in lower abdomen)
* can only pee in small amounts or you can't pee
* an urgent need to pee or you need to pee often, with a burning feeling
* a fever:
  + 38.0°C or higher taken by ear
  + 37.6°C or higher taken by mouth or under armpit
* leaking urine longer than 6 to 8 weeks after birth

Menstruation (period) changes

* If you are exclusively breastfeeding, you may not have your period while your baby is taking only breast milk (your period often starts again around 6 months when your baby starts solid foods). This varies from person to person.
* If you are formula feeding, your period will likely start within 6 to 12 weeks

*What can I do?*

* Consider birth control options and timing for another baby
* Your body will ovulate (release an egg) the month before your period returns

*When should I contact my health care provider?*

Talk to your health care provider about birth control options and any concerns you may have about your period.

Caesarean birth (C-section)

After a C-section, it can take up to 6 weeks for your body to heal. You may experience:

* fatigue
* pain at the incision and in your lower stomach
* difficulty and pain when moving
* bleeding from your vagina

Any stitches should dissolve on their own. If you had staples to close your incision, your health care provider will remove them.

*What can I do?*

* Take pain medication as directed by your health care provider
* Get rest when you can (sleep when your baby sleeps)
* Ask for help with things you cannot do because of your surgery (lifting, bending, housework)
* Take a shower (it is ok for your incision to get wet) and pat the incision dry after your shower
* Wait to take a bath until your incision is fully healed
* Don't lift anything heavier than your baby for the first 6 weeks
* Support your incision with a pillow when you cough or sneeze
* Use a pillow to support your stomach when breastfeeding
* Move often, even a little bit
* Gradually increase your physical activity
* Avoid high-impact exercise and anything that strains your stomach muscles
* Talk to your health care provider about when it is safe to drive

*When should I contact my health care provider?*

If you feel unwell or experience:

* pain that does not go away when you take pain medication
* a fever
  + 38.0°C or higher taken by ear
  + 37.6°C or higher taken by mouth or under armpit)
* signs of infection in your incision: pain, oozing, redness and warm to touch
* an increase in vaginal bleeding
* pain in your calf, behind your knee or in the thigh or groin
* redness and swelling in your leg or groin

Sleep

It is common to suffer from a lack of sleep when taking care of your newborn. Be patient. Parenting is hard and can be exhausting! Find ways to get more sleep and ask for help when you need it.

How much sleep do I need?

Adults should try to get 7 to 9 hours of quality sleep each night, but that is not easy with a newborn. You can expect to sleep 2 to 4 hours at a time during the first few weeks and months. How much sleep you need depends on what is normal for you. Get as much rest and sleep as you can but be realistic. Work towards going to bed and waking up at the same time every day.

What can I do to get more sleep?

* Sleep when your baby sleeps
* Focus more on taking care of your baby and less on things like housework
* Extend your sleep at night by going to bed earlier and sleeping longer in the morning
* Share the nights with your partner, family member or a friend
* Limit the number of visitors
* Ask for help with housework, meals and taking care of other children
* Help your baby develop healthy sleep patterns
* Make time to go for walks and be active

Nutrition

What you eat and drink is important for your health and to help care for your baby. You may feel too tired and overwhelmed to think about eating healthy while taking care of your newborn. Eating healthy will help your body recover and feel better.

Eat a variety of healthy foods each day while breastfeeding and recovering from childbirth.

* Choose vegetables, fruits, whole grain foods and protein foods
* Fill half your plate with vegetables and fruits at meals and snack times
* Choose foods that have little or no added sodium (salt), sugars or saturated fat

Choose foods with healthy fats.

Choose foods like nuts, seeds, fatty fish and vegetable oils, which contain mostly unsaturated fat (healthy fats). Limit your intake of saturated fats (butter, cheese and red meats).

Take a daily multivitamin that contains folic acid.

Folic acid helps support your baby's healthy growth and development during pregnancy and while breastfeeding. Take a multivitamin with 0.4 mg of folic acid every day.

Healthy eating is more than just the foods you eat.

* Be sure to take the time to eat (limit distractions like your phone or TV)
* Plan your meals and snacks to help you make healthier food choices
* Culture and food traditions can be a part of healthy eating

Make water your drink of choice.

It is important to drink lots of water while you recover from childbirth. Water carries nutrients to your body, takes away waste and helps prevent constipation and swelling. Other healthy options include white milk and unsweetened fortified plant-based beverages (like soy or almond beverage). Make water the easy choice by carrying a reusable water bottle.

Breastfeeding can make you more dehydrated. Drink water when you feel thirsty. It helps support milk production. Try to have a glass of water every time your baby breastfeeds.

If you are breastfeeding, eat a small amount of extra food each day.

You need more calories and nutrients for your breastmilk to meet the needs of your growing baby. This can be an extra snack or small meal, such as whole grain cereal with milk or yogurt and sliced fruit, seeds or chopped nuts.

Can I eat anything when I am breastfeeding?

Many of the foods you may have avoided during pregnancy are safe to eat after giving birth. But it is safest to continue to avoid some things:

* **Avoid drinking alcohol:** This is the safest approach, and it is especially important when your baby is very young. Their body is developing very fast and cannot process alcohol well. An occasional drink can be okay, as long as you plan for it. Breastfeed or express your milk before you have a drink, then wait at least 2 hours per drink before breastfeeding again.
* **Be mindful of your caffeine intake:** It is safe to have caffeine while breastfeeding, but only in small amounts. Too much caffeine and your baby may have trouble sleeping. Caffeine is found in coffee, tea (black, oolong, white and green), soft drinks (cola), energy drinks, chocolate, and herbs such as guarana and yerba mate. Keep your caffeine intake below 300 mg a day (two cups of coffee).
* **Choose fish that is low in mercury:** Some types of fish contain mercury, which can harm your baby's brain development. To limit your exposure to mercury in fish, follow advice from Health Canada. Vary the types of fish you eat and choose fish that are low in mercury. Check with your local, provincial or territorial government for any advisories on local fish.

What are some healthy postpartum snack ideas?

Healthy snacks can help keep you energized. Prepare snacks ahead of time so you can grab them easily. Here are some tips to help:

* Keep fruit on the counter
* Chop extra vegetables when cooking
* Ask family and friends to make muffins or granola bars you can store in the freezer
* Keep roasted chickpeas and nuts in your bag for when you get hungry on the go

What should I do to lose my baby weight?

You do not need to make drastic changes to lose weight after your baby is born. You will gradually lose weight with a healthy and active lifestyle. Breastfeeding also helps, as your body uses energy to make milk. Make sure breastfeeding is going well before you try to lose weight. Talk to your health care provider about a healthy goal for weight loss.

Physical activity

When can I start exercising after having my baby?

If you had a healthy pregnancy and a normal vaginal birth, you can slowly start exercising soon after delivery. If you had a caesarean birth, or complications during your pregnancy or vaginal birth, talk to your health care provider about when it is safe to start exercising.

Will exercising impact my breastmilk?

Exercise should not affect your ability to breastfeed. Moderate exercise will not affect how much breastmilk you have or the quality of it. If your baby does not breastfeed well after you exercise, try breastfeeding before. This can also make exercise more comfortable for you by decreasing the size of your breasts.

What about pelvic floor exercises?

Pelvic floor exercises, known as Kegel exercises, help to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles that support your uterus, bladder and bowels. These muscles control the passage of urine and stool and support your baby during pregnancy. Pregnancy and childbirth can stretch and weaken these muscles. This can lead to urine control problems when you cough, laugh or exercise.

Practicing Kegel exercises in the first few days after your baby is born may help improve your bladder control. Here is how to get started:

* Get into a comfortable position by lying down, sitting or standing
* Relax your hips and bum
* Tighten your pelvic floor muscles by pretending you are stopping urine midstream
* Hold for 5 to 10 seconds and keep breathing normally
* Relax for 10 seconds
* Repeat 5 times until it becomes easy, then increase to 10 times
* Practice 3 to 5 times each day

Talk to your health care provider about how to do pelvic floor exercises.

Caring for your baby

During the first few days and weeks with your new baby, you will get to know your baby and learn about how to care for them. Not only will you be learning about how to care for your baby, but you will also be learning about their temperament. Each baby is unique and born with their own temperament. Your baby's temperament is the natural part of their personality. You may have noticed that some babies are quiet and others cry more, some are cuddly while others are more squirmy. These are differences in their temperament. You may start noticing certain behaviours in your newborn soon after birth. How you respond to them will also help form their personality. It will take time for you to get to know your baby and figure out how best to respond to their needs. As you respond to their needs in a loving, nurturing way, you will get to know their unique personality and build a strong foundation for your relationship.

Newborn Sleep

* Your newborn may sleep up to 18 hours a day
* Babies tend to sleep for short periods, about 3 to 4 hours at a time
* As they grow, they spend less time sleeping each day, but will sleep for longer periods at a time

*What you can do:*

To help your baby learn ways to self-comfort and fall asleep on their own:

* Develop a soothing bedtime routine, such as a bath and lullaby. As they grow older, you can read them a book
* Develop the habit of placing them in their crib, cradle or basinet when your baby shows signs of being tired
* During bedtime and nap times, always place your baby on their back to sleep

Newborn Diapering

* Your baby's diaper needs to be changed regularly
* Clean their genitals (private parts) with every diaper change
* Make sure the skin is dry before you put on a clean diaper

*What you can do:*

To keep the area clean:

* Use unscented wipes or use a cloth with water for pee [add soap for stool (poop) when using a cloth]
* For female: wipe from front to back and be sure to clean in the creases
* For uncircumcised male: do not retract the foreskin
* For circumcised male: follow the care instructions your health care provider gives you

To clean after a bowel movement (poop):

* Change the diaper as soon as possible (poop can irritate your baby's skin)
* You don't need to use creams or powders unless your baby's skin is red or irritated
* If your baby has diarrhea, apply a barrier cream or zinc paste to keep your baby's skin from being irritated

To prevent a diaper rash:

* Change your baby's diaper often
* Use a barrier cream or zinc paste if their skin is irritated or to prevent a rash if they have diarrhea
* Give your baby a bath if their rash is causing them pain when you change their diaper
* Leave your baby without a diaper to help their skin heal

Newborn Bathing

Your baby does not need a bath every day. Wash your baby's face and hands often and clean their genitals at each diaper change.

*What you can do:*

To give your baby a bath:

* Make sure the room is warm
* Add only a few centimetres of warm water to the bottom of the tub or sink
* Hold your baby firmly
* Use soap if you like, but it is not necessary
* Use clean, fresh water to wash their face, eyes, ears, nose and mouth
* Clean female genitals (private parts) from front to back and be sure to clean the creases
* Wash male genitals gently (for uncircumcised boys, do not retract his foreskin)
* Dry your baby's skin completely

Never leave your baby alone during a bath. A baby can easily drown in very little water. If you need to leave the room, take your baby with you.

Newborn Umbilical cord care

Your baby's umbilical cord will gradually dry up and fall off within 1 to 3 weeks.

In the beginning, the cord will be pale yellow. It will slowly turn dark brown before falling off.

There may be a small amount of bleeding when it falls off.

*What you can do:*

To care for your baby's umbilical cord:

* It is okay if it gets wet during a bath
* Gently dry off the cord after the bath to keep it dry
* Don't cover the umbilical cord or apply anything to it
* Fold the top of the diaper down to allow the umbilical cord to be exposed to the air and dry up

Contact your health care provider if your baby has a fever or their umbilical cord shows any signs of infection, including:

* redness
* swelling
* yellow or green pus
* smelly discharge
* significant bleeding

Newborn Nail care

During the first week of life, your baby's skin is attached to their nails. Wait until your baby is at least 1 week old before trimming their nails.

In the meantime, your baby can wear soft mittens to protect their face from scratches

*What you can do:*

To trim your baby's nails:

* Use a nail file or baby scissors to gently trim the nails
* Follow the natural curve of the fingers when you trim
* Trim toenail nails in a straight line
* Try trimming after a bath or when they are sleeping if they don't like having their nails trimmed