YOUR BODY AFTER BABY: THE FIRST 6 WEEKS



 



**KEY POINTS**

* Your body changes a lot after you give birth. Some changes are physical and others are emotional.
* Learn about common postpartum discomforts and what do to about them. If you’re worried about a discomfort, call your health care provider.
* Talk to your provider before you take any medicine to treat a discomfort. If you’re breastfeeding, some medicines aren’t safe for your baby.
* Go to all of your postpartum checkups, even if you’re feeling fine. Some health conditions after pregnancy need medical care.

How does your body change in the weeks after giving birth?

Many things are happening in your body right after you have a baby. During pregnancy, your body changed a lot. It worked hard to keep your baby safe and healthy. Now that your baby is here, your body is changing again. Some of these changes are physical, like your breasts getting full of milk. Others are emotional, like feeling extra stress.

Many discomforts and body changes after giving birth are normal. But sometimes they’re [signs or symptoms of a health problem](https://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/warning-signs-of-health-problems-after-birth.aspx) that needs treatment. Go to all of [your postpartum checkups](https://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/your-postpartum-checkups.aspx), even if you’re feeling fine. These are medical checkups you get after having a baby to make sure you’re recovering well from [labor and birth](https://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/labor-and-birth.aspx). At your checkups, your health care provider can help spot and treat health conditions. Postpartum care is important because new moms are at risk of serious and sometimes [life-threatening health complications](https://www.marchofdimes.org/complications/pregnancy-related-death-maternal-death-and-maternal-mortality.aspx) in the days and weeks after giving birth.

What is perineum soreness?

The perineum is the area between your vagina and rectum. It stretches and may tear during labor and vaginal birth. It’s often sore after giving birth, and it may be more sore if you have an episiotomy. This is a cut made at the opening of the vagina to help let your baby out.

**What you can do:**

* Do Kegel exercises. These exercises strengthen the muscles in the pelvic area. To do Kegel exercises, squeeze the muscles that you use to stop yourself from passing urine (peeing). Hold the muscles tight for 10 seconds and then release. Try to do this at least 10 times in a row, three times a day.
* Put a cold pack on your perineum. Use ice wrapped in a towel. Or you can buy cold packs that you freeze in your freezer.
* Sit on a pillow or a donut-shaped cushion.
* Soak in a warm bath.
* Wipe from front to back after going to the bathroom. This can help prevent infection as your episiotomy heals.
* Ask your provider about pain medicine.

What are afterbirth pains?

Afterbirth pains are belly cramps you feel as your uterus (womb) shrinks back to its regular size after pregnancy. The cramps should go away in a few days. Right after you give birth, your uterus is round and hard and weighs about 2½ pounds. By about 6 weeks after birth, it weighs only 2 ounces.

**What you can do:**

Ask your provider about [over-the-counter medicine](https://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/over-the-counter-medicine-supplements-and-herbal-products.aspx) you can take for pain. Over-the-counter medicine is medicine you can buy without a prescription from your provider.

What body changes can happen after a cesarean section?

[Cesarean birth](https://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/having-a-c-section.aspx) (also called c-section) is surgery in which your baby is born through a cut that your provider makes in your belly and uterus. A c-section is major surgery, so it may take a while for you to recover. You may be really tired for the first few days or weeks after a c-section because you lost blood during the surgery. The incision (cut) on your belly may be sore.

**What you can do:**

* Ask your provider for pain medicine. Check with him before you take any medicine for pain.
* Ask your partner, family and friends to help you with the baby and around the house.
* Get rest when you can. Sleep when [your baby sleeps](https://www.marchofdimes.org/baby/safe-sleep-for-your-baby.aspx), even when he naps during the day.
* Don’t lift from a squatting position. Don’t lift anything heavier than your baby.
* Support your belly with pillows when you’re [breastfeeding](https://www.marchofdimes.org/baby/breastfeeding-is-best.aspx).
* Drink plenty of water to help replace fluids in your body.

What is vaginal discharge?

After your baby is born, your body gets rid of the blood and tissue that was inside your uterus. This is called vaginal discharge or lochia. For the first few days, it’s heavy, bright red and may contain [blood clots](https://www.marchofdimes.org/complications/blood-clots-and-pregnancy.aspx). Over time, the flow gets less and lighter in color. You may have discharge for a few weeks or even for a month or more.

**What you can do:**

Use sanitary pads until the discharge stops.

What is breast engorgement?

This is when your breasts swell as they fill with milk. It usually happens a few days after giving birth. Your breasts may feel tender and sore. The discomfort usually goes away once you start breastfeeding regularly. If you’re not breastfeeding, it may last until your breasts stop making milk, usually within a few days.

**What you can do:**

* Breastfeed your baby. Try not to miss a feeding or go a long time between feedings. Don’t skip night feedings.
* Before you breastfeed your baby, express a small amount of milk from your breast with a [breast pump](https://www.marchofdimes.org/baby/using-a-breast-pump.aspx) or by hand.
* Take a warm shower or lay warm towels on your breasts to help your milk flow. If your engorgement is really painful, put cold packs on your breasts.
* If your breasts are leaking between feedings, wear nursing pads in your bra so your clothes don’t get wet.
* Tell your provider if your breasts stay swollen and are painful.
* If you’re not planning to breastfeed, wear a firm, supportive bra (like a sports bra).

What is nipple pain?

If you’re breastfeeding, you may have nipple plain during the first few days, especially if your nipples crack.

**What you can do:**

* Talk to your provider or a lactation consultant to be sure your baby is latching on to your breast the right way. A lactation consultant is a person trained to help women breastfeed, even women who have breastfeeding problems. Latching on is when your baby’s mouth is securely attached to (placed around) your nipple.
* Ask your provider about cream to put on your nipples.
* After breastfeeding, massage some breast milk onto your nipples. Let your breasts air dry.

What is swelling?

Lots of women have swelling in their hands, feet and face during pregnancy. It’s caused by extra fluids in your body. It may take time for the swelling to go away after you have your baby.

**What you can do:**

* Lie on your left side when resting or sleeping.
* Put your feet up.
* Try to stay cool and wear loose clothes.
* Drink plenty of water.

What are hemorrhoids?

Hemorrhoids are painful, swollen veins in and around the anus that may hurt or bleed. Hemorrhoids are common during and after pregnancy.

**What you can do:**

* Soak in a warm bath.
* Ask your provider about using an over-the-counter spray or cream for pain.
* Eat foods that are high in fiber, such as fruits, vegetables and whole-grain breads and cereals.
* Drink lots of water.
* Try not to strain when you’re having a bowel movement (pooping).

What is constipation?

Constipation is when you don’t have bowel movements, you don’t have them often or your stools (poop) are hard to pass. You also may have painful gas. This may happen for a few days after you give birth.

**What you can do:**

* Eat foods that are high in fiber.
* Drink lots of water.
* Ask your provider about medicine to take.

What urinary problems can happen after giving birth?

In the first few days after giving birth, you may feel pain or burning when you urinate (pee). Or you may try to urinate but find that you can’t. Sometimes you may not be able to stop urinating. This is called incontinence. It usually goes away as your pelvic muscles become stronger again.

**What you can do for pain, burning or if you have trouble urinating:**

* Drink lots of water.
* Run water in the sink when you go to the bathroom.
* Soak in a warm bath.
* If the pain continues, tell your provider.

What you can do for incontinence: Do Kegel exercises to strengthen your pelvic muscles.

Why do you sweat a lot after giving birth?

This happens often to new moms, especially at night. It’s caused by all the changing hormones in your body after pregnancy.

**What you can do:**

* Sleep on a towel to help keep your sheets and pillow dry.
* Don’t use too many blankets or wear warm clothes to bed.

Why do you feel tired after giving birth?

You may have lost blood during labor and birth. This can make your body tired. And your baby probably doesn’t let you sleep all night!

**What you can do:**

* Sleep when your baby sleeps, even when he naps during the day.
* Eat [healthy foods](https://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/eating-healthy-during-pregnancy.aspx), like fruits, vegetables, whole-grain breads and pasta, and lean meat and chicken. Limit sweets and foods with a lot of fat.
* Ask your partner, family and friends for help with the baby and around the house.
* Limit visitors. You’ll have plenty of time for family and friends to meet your new baby when you’re feeling rested.

When can you lose weight after giving birth?

You lose about 10 pounds right away after giving birth and a little more within the first week. This is a great time to get to a healthy weight, no matter how much you weighed before you got pregnant. Eating healthy and being active every day helps boost your energy level and can make you feel better. If you’re at a healthy weight, you’re less likely to have health conditions, like [diabetes](https://www.marchofdimes.org/complications/preexisting-diabetes.aspx) and [high blood pressure](https://www.marchofdimes.org/complications/high-blood-pressure-during-pregnancy.aspx), than if you’re over- or underweight. And just in case you get pregnant again, or if you’re planning to have another baby sometime in the future, it’s best to be at a healthy weight before your next pregnancy.

**What you can do:**

* Talk to your provider about your weight. If you were [overweight before pregnancy](https://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/being-overweight-during-pregnancy.aspx), you may want to lose more weight than you gained during pregnancy.
* Eat healthy foods. Limit sweets and foods with a lot of fat.
* Drink lots of water.
* Ask your provider about being active, especially if you’ve had a c-section. Begin slowly and increase your activity over time. Walking and swimming are great activities for new moms. Do something active every day.
* Breastfeed your baby. Breastfeeding helps you burn calories. This can help you lose the weight you gained during pregnancy faster than if you weren’t breastfeeding.
* Don’t try to lose too much weight too fast. Your body needs nutrients from food to heal. If you’re breastfeeding, losing weight too fast can reduce your milk supply.
* Don’t feel badly if you don’t lose the weight as quickly as you’d like. It takes time for your body and your belly to get back in shape. Staying fit over time is more important than getting in shape right after giving birth.

What skin changes can happen after giving birth?

You may have stretch marks on your belly where your skin stretched during pregnancy. Some women also get them on their thighs, hips and bottom. They may not disappear after giving birth, but they do fade over time.

**What you can do:**

Use creams or lotions on your skin. They don’t make stretch marks go away, but they can help reduce itching that comes with stretch marks.

What hair changes can happen after giving birth?

Your hair may have seemed thicker and fuller during pregnancy. This is because high hormone levels in your body made you lose less hair during pregnancy. After your baby is born, your hair may thin out. You may even lose hair. Hair loss usually stops within 6 months after you give birth. Your hair should regain its normal fullness within a year.

**What you can do:**

* Eat lots of fruits and vegetables. The nutrients in fruits and veggies may help protect your hair and help it grow.
* Be gentle with your hair. Don’t wear tight ponytails, braids or rollers. These can pull and stress your hair.
* Use the cool setting on your hair dryer.

When do you get your period again after pregnancy?

If you’re not breastfeeding, your period may start again 6 to 8 weeks after giving birth. If you are breastfeeding, it may not start again for months. Some women don’t have a period again until they stop breastfeeding. When your period returns, it may not be the same as before you were pregnant. It may be shorter or longer than it was. Over time it often returns to the way it was before you got pregnant.

When can you get pregnant again?

Many health care providers recommend waiting 4 to 6 weeks after giving birth to give your body time to heal before you have sex. When you’re ready for sex, be careful – you can get pregnant even before your period starts. This is because you may ovulate (release an egg) before you get your period again.

**What you can do:**

Use [birth control](https://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/birth-control.aspx) to help make sure you don’t get pregnant again until you’re ready. Birth control helps keep you from getting pregnant. Examples of birth control include intrauterine devices (also called IUDs), implants, the pill and condoms. Talk to your provider about which birth control to use, especially if you’re breastfeeding. Some types of birth control can reduce your milk supply. Breastfeeding is not birth control. It does not prevent pregnancy.

For most women, it’s best to [wait at least 18 months](https://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/how-long-should-you-wait-before-getting-pregnant-again.aspx) (1½ years) between giving birth and getting pregnant again. Too little time between pregnancies increases your risk of [premature birth](https://www.marchofdimes.org/complications/preterm-labor-and-premature-birth-are-you-at-risk.aspx) (before 37 weeks of pregnancy). [Premature babies](https://www.marchofdimes.org/complications/premature-babies.aspx) are more likely to have health problems than babies born on time. Your body needs time to fully recover from your last pregnancy before it’s ready for your next pregnancy.

What can you do about feeling stressed and overwhelmed?

Your baby didn’t come with a set of instructions. You may feel overwhelmed trying to take care of her. Taking care of a baby is a lot to think about.

**What you can do:**

* Tell your partner how you feel. Let your partner help take care of the baby.
* Ask your friends and family for help. Tell them exactly what they can do for you, like going grocery shopping or making meals.
* Find a support group of new moms. A support group is a group of people who have the same kinds of concerns. They meet together to try to help each other. Ask your provider to help you find a support group of new moms near where you live. Or look for a support group online.
* Eat healthy foods and do something active every day.
* Don’t smoke, drink alcohol or use harmful drugs. All of these things are bad for you and can make it hard for you to handle stress.

What are the baby blues and postpartum depression?

[Baby blues](https://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/baby-blues-after-pregnancy.aspx) (also called postpartum blues) are feelings of sadness a woman may have in the first few days after having a baby. Baby blues can happen 2 to 3 days after you have your baby and can last up to 2 weeks. They usually go away on their own, and you don’t need any treatment.

[Postpartum depression](https://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/postpartum-depression.aspx) (also called PPD) is a kind of depression that some women get after having a baby. It's strong feelings of sadness, anxiety (worry) and tiredness that last for a long time after giving birth. These feelings can make it hard for you to take care of yourself and your baby. PPD is a medical condition that needs treatment to get better. It’s the most common complication for women who have just had a baby.

**What you can do about the baby blues:**

* Get as much sleep as you can.
* Don’t drink alcohol, use street drugs or use harmful drugs. All of these can affect your mood and make you feel worse. And they can make it hard for you to take care of your baby.
* Ask for help from your partner, family and friends. Tell them exactly what they can do for you.
* Take time for yourself. Ask someone you trust to watch your baby so you can get out of the house.
* Connect with other new moms. Ask your provider to help you find a support group of new moms.
* If you have sad feelings that last longer than 2 weeks, tell your health care provider.

**What you can do about postpartum depression:**

* If you think you have PPD, tell your provider.
* Learn about risk factors for PPD and signs and symptoms of PPD.
* Ask your provider about treatment for PPD.
* If you’re worried about hurting yourself or your baby, call emergency services (911) right away.

How can you handle going back to work or school?

It may be hard for you to leave your baby with a caregiver all day, even if it’s a family member or a close friend. It also may be hard to find a caregiver you trust. You and your partner may disagree about what type of child care is best for your baby. You may be upset that you can’t stay home with your baby all the time.

**What you can do:**

* Talk to your partner about child care. Figure out how much you can spend and what kind of care you want. For example, you can have a caregiver come to your home to take care of your baby. Or you can take your baby to a child care center.
* Ask friends and family about child care they use. Maybe you can use the same person or service.
* If you’re using a child care center, ask for names and phone numbers of people who use the center. Call to ask how they feel about the center’s care.
* Ask your boss if you can ease back into work. Maybe you can work a few hours a day at first, or just a few days a week.

How can you and your partner get used to being new parents?

Both you and your partner are getting used to having a baby around. Your partner may be just as stressed and nervous about being a parent as you are. Rely on each other to figure things out.

**What you can do:**

* Learn about taking care of your baby together. Read baby-care books and go to baby-care classes.
* Let your partner help with the baby. Don’t try to do everything yourself.
* Talk to each other. Talking about your feelings can help keep you from feeling hurt and frustrated.
* Make time for just the two of you. Go for a walk or out to dinner. Ask someone you trust to take care of the baby for an hour or two.
* Tell your partner what your provider says about how long to wait to have sex again. Ask your provider to talk to your partner, if you think that’s helpful.

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**See also:**[Your postpartum checkups](https://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/your-postpartum-checkups.aspx), [Warning signs and symptoms of health problems after giving birth](https://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/warning-signs-of-health-problems-after-birth.aspx), [Pregnancy-related death, maternal death and maternal mortality](https://www.marchofdimes.org/complications/pregnancy-related-death-maternal-death-and-maternal-mortality.aspx), [Postpartum depression](https://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/postpartum-depression.aspx), [Baby blues after pregnancy](https://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/baby-blues-after-pregnancy.aspx), [Keeping breast milk safe and healthy](https://www.marchofdimes.org/baby/keeping-breast-milk-safe-and-healthy.aspx), [Birth control](https://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/birth-control.aspx), [How long should you wait before getting pregnant again](https://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/how-long-should-you-wait-before-getting-pregnant-again.aspx)