



Afterbirth pains

After giving birth, some women can experience pains for a few days. These pains are referred to as 'afterbirth pains' and can feel like period pains or labour pains. They are often felt while breastfeeding due to the uterus contracting and tightening but can also occur randomly and are more likely to be felt following a second or subsequent birth. Afterbirth pains can be relieved by applying hot packs or taking simple pain relief 30 minutes before breastfeeding, such as paracetamol (normal dose 1-2 tablets taken every 4 hours to a maximum dose of 8 tablets in every 24 hours).

Stitches

If you've had stitches after a caesarean birth, vaginal/ perineal tearing or an episiotomy, it is advisable to keep the wound clean and dry. Have a bath or shower with plain warm water and after bathing, dry yourself carefully. If you have had vaginal stitches, in the first few days, remember to sit down gently and lie on your side to keep pressure off the area.

Pain, discomfort and numbness are common after having stitches. If the stitches are sore and uncomfortable, tell your doctor or midwife, as they may be able to recommend measures to relieve pain. Regular pain relief, such as paracetamol, will also help. Usually stitches are reabsorbable, meaning they are absorbed by the body and do not need to be removed.

If you have swelling or pain around the opening of your vagina, you can put ice



- If you have other children, planning for childcare or for extra help at home
- Not expecting to keep the house perfect
- Not being afraid to ask for help
- Lying flat regularly to take pressure off your pelvic floor

Diet and Nutrition

Eating a variety of healthy food is important to help you keep your energy up and can help you to lose baby weight after pregnancy. Try to consider the following points when choosing what to eat:

- Calcium – increase the number of serves of dairy and green leafy vegetables, particularly if you are breastfeeding.
- Fibre – eat plenty of fibre in the form of fresh fruit (particularly pears) and wholegrain cereals. This will help to activate your bowels.
- Protein – eat meat, fish, poultry, eggs or legumes to help regain and maintain your strength.
- Vitamins and Minerals (particularly vitamin C) – increase the number of serves of fruit and vegetables to promote healing. Limit your intake of fruit juices and canned fruit though as they are high in sugar with limited nutritional value.
- Iron – eat iron-rich foods to replace what was lost by bleeding during and following the birth. Iron-rich foods include red meat, seafood, green leafy vegetables, legumes and tofu.
- Iodine Supplement - continue with your iodine supplement

If your doctor or midwife has told you that you lost a large amount of blood or had a postpartum haemorrhage, it may take longer for you to feel back to normal and an iron supplement may be advised. Combining iron-rich foods with vitamin C will increase the absorption of iron.

- Fluids – increase your fluids to help your bladder and bowels work

sooner and more easily. Having a glass of water within reach while you are breastfeeding is also recommended, as most women feel quite thirsty when feeding their baby. Make sure that you don't skip meals or go for long periods without eating. Try to eat small, nutritious snacks throughout the day to keep up your energy.

Exercise

Exercise helps you feel good and helps your body get back to its pre-pregnancy strength. Although your body needs time to recover, some exercises can start the next day. Even if you are resting in bed, it is important to do deep breathing and leg exercises regularly. Postnatal exercises are important to get all your muscles working again, but take things at a gentle pace.

Pelvic floor exercises

The pelvic floor is a group of muscles that help support your bladder, uterus and bowel. Your pelvic floor muscles can become weak or damaged after your pregnancy, so it is important to exercise these muscles to strengthen them.

It is quite common after having a baby to leak urine accidentally if you laugh, cough or move suddenly. Pelvic floor exercises can help prevent this. It is normal for your pelvic floor to feel weak and you may not feel these muscles working. To engage your pelvic floor, firmly tense the muscles around your vagina and bottom as if you are trying to stop passing wind. Hold for as long as you can, then slowly release and relax. Squeeze and let go a couple of times until you are sure you have found the right muscles. Try not to squeeze your buttocks. Do at least 25 repetitions at various times of the day. You can do these exercises while you stand or sit. You can practise while urinating, contract to stop, then relax to release the flow of urine.

Does it feel like you're not getting the most out of your pelvic floor exercises?

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