

Taking Care of Yourself After Birth

The most important thing you can do is take care of yourself by resting and eating well. Your recovery will be shorter and you'll feel better if you don't overdo it in the first couple of weeks. Your first priority is to care for yourself and your baby. Let others handle the household tasks.

Stay in your pajamas for a few days. It's a nice reminder to yourself and everyone else that you're taking it easy. You don't have to stay in bed but rest as much as you can.

Lochia, or postpartum bleeding, starts out like a heavy period. It's usually quite a bit lighter after the first 24 to 36 hours. It will gradually turn from red to pink to brown or yellow. In the absence of signs of infection (pain, foul odor), bleeding that suddenly becomes heavier is sometimes a sign that you're doing too much so take a day to really rest.

Afterpains can be quite bothersome, especially when nursing. They mean that your uterus is contracting to reduce bleeding and help shrink the uterus back to its non-pregnant size. You can take ibuprofen or acetaminophen if you need it. Afterpains decrease significantly after the first few days, so hang in there.

The first bowel movement after giving birth can be uncomfortable. Although it might take a day or two for your body to get back into a normal elimination routine, don't postpone it when you do feel the urge. Supporting the perineum during a bowel movement can help ease the discomfort. Avoid constipation. A mild stool softener can help.

Use your peri-bottle each time you go to the bathroom. The warm water is soothing, dilutes urine so it doesn't sting any small tears and helps keep things clean. Pat gently with toilet paper instead of wiping.

Don't lift anything heavier than the baby for the first couple of weeks.

Set up a baby station near the bed with diapers, wipes, extra baby clothes, a bottle of water for yourself, etc. Putting everything into a basket makes it easy to take it with you from room to room, whether you're staying in bed or lounging on the sofa.

Arrange for as much help as you can get with meals and older children. Don't hesitate to take advantage of any and all offers of help.

Lower your standards for a little while by using paper plates, eating your favorite takeout foods, letting the dishes sit in the sink for a little while, etc. In years to come you'll remember these first precious days with your baby, not how clean your house was!

After the first day or two, get outside for a little while each day. The fresh air and sunshine will do you good!

Resume Kegel exercises as soon as you can. You'll speed healing by increasing blood flow to the pelvic floor and get your muscles back in shape much faster. A good way to remember is to do a few every time you nurse the baby.