

Postpartum Recovery Guide

What to Expect & How to Care for Yourself After Delivery

David R. Ghausi, DO

Congratulations on the arrival of your new baby! The postpartum period (often called the "fourth trimester") is a time of immense physical healing and emotional transition. While your body is recovering, it is completely normal to experience a variety of symptoms. This guide outlines what to expect and when it is important to seek medical care.

Universal Postpartum Experiences

1. Vaginal Bleeding (Lochia)

- Expect bleeding similar to a heavy menstrual period for the first few days. Over time, it will transition to a pinkish-brown color, and eventually become a yellowish-white discharge.
- Bleeding can last anywhere from 4 to 6 weeks. You may notice temporary increases in flow when breastfeeding or increasing your physical activity.
- **Care Tip:** Use maternity pads. Do not use tampons or menstrual cups until you are explicitly cleared by your doctor at your postpartum check-up.

2. Breast Changes & Engorgement

- Around day 3 to 5 after delivery, your breasts will likely feel heavy, swollen, warm, and tender as your mature milk comes in.
- **Care Tip:** If nursing, feed on demand and gently massage or use warm compresses right before feeding to help milk flow. If you are not nursing, wear a firm, supportive bra around the clock, use cold packs, and avoid any nipple stimulation or expressing milk.

3. Emotional Changes

- **The "Baby Blues":** Up to 80% of mothers experience mood swings, tearfulness, irritability, and mild anxiety in the first 2 weeks. This is normal and driven by dramatic hormonal drops and sleep deprivation.
- **Postpartum Depression (PPD):** If feelings of intense sadness, emptiness, hopelessness, or an inability to care for yourself or your baby last beyond 2 weeks, contact your healthcare provider.

4. Night Sweats & Hair Loss

- Your body needs to shed the excess fluid accumulated during pregnancy. This often happens through intense sweating, particularly at night.
- Due to hormonal shifts, many women experience temporary, sometimes significant, hair thinning (postpartum alopecia) around 3 to 4 months post-delivery.

- **Clinic Offering:** We offer Nutrafol postpartum hair support vitamins to help combat hair thinning. Available for \$199 for a 3-month supply. Ask our staff for details.

- **Weight Loss Solutions:** Our practice offers comprehensive weight loss solutions, including GLP-1/2 medications, available once you are done breastfeeding.

Delivery-Specific Recovery

Vaginal Delivery Recovery

- **Perineal Pain & Swelling:** Your perineum (the area between the vagina and anus) will be sore, especially if you had a perineal tear or an episiotomy.
Care: Use a peri-bottle filled with warm water to rinse the area while urinating. Apply ice packs (or frozen maxipads) for the first 24-48 hours, and take warm sitz baths thereafter.
- **Hemorrhoids:** Swollen veins in the rectum are incredibly common from the pressure of pushing during labor.
Care: Use witch hazel pads (like Tucks), apply over-the-counter hydrocortisone cream, and take prescribed stool softeners to avoid straining during bowel movements.
- **Pelvic Floor Weakness:** Mild urinary incontinence (leaking a little urine when coughing, sneezing, or laughing) is common. Once cleared by your doctor, gentle pelvic floor exercises (Kegels) can help rebuild muscle strength.

Cesarean Delivery (C-Section) Recovery

- **Incision Pain & Care:** The abdominal incision will be sore for several weeks.
Care: Keep the area clean and dry. Wash gently with mild soap and water in the shower. Support your incision by pressing a pillow firmly against your stomach when coughing, laughing, or sneezing.
- **Mobility & Lifting Restrictions:** For the first 6 weeks, do not lift anything heavier than your baby. Getting in and out of bed may pull on your incision; try rolling onto your side and pushing yourself up with your arms to protect your abdominal muscles. It is ok to drive 2-3 weeks after surgery as long as you are not taking narcotics and feel comfortable to drive.
- **Gas Pains:** Abdominal surgery often temporarily slows down your digestive tract, leading to trapped gas and sharp pains in your stomach or even radiating up to your shoulder.
Care: Take short, gentle walks around the house to get your bowels moving, stay hydrated, and use gas-relief medication (like simethicone) as approved by your provider.



When to Call Your Doctor (Red Flags)

Seek immediate medical attention or go to the nearest emergency room if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- **Heavy Bleeding:** Soaking through a maxi pad in a single hour, or passing blood clots larger than a golf ball.
- **Fever:** A body temperature of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or experiencing chills.
- **Signs of Infection:** Foul-smelling vaginal discharge, or a C-section incision that is bright red, oozing pus, opening up, or hot to the touch.
- **Signs of Mastitis (Breast Infection):** A hard, painful, red, or swollen area on the breast, often accompanied by a fever, chills, or flu-like body aches.
- **Signs of Preeclampsia:** A severe headache that won't go away even with medication, visual changes (blurriness, seeing spots), or severe pain in your upper right abdomen.
- **Blood Clot Warning:** Swelling, redness, warmth, or severe pain in one of your legs (usually the calf).
- **Mental Health Emergency:** Having thoughts of harming yourself or your baby, experiencing hallucinations, or having severe panic attacks.

This handout is provided for general informational and educational purposes only and does not substitute professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always consult your healthcare provider with any questions or concerns regarding your postpartum recovery.