

Bouncing Back: Recovery After Giving Birth

Your body goes through many changes during pregnancy and delivery. After giving birth, your clothing size, breast shape and even your shoe size may be different. Although it might take some getting used to, these changes are a good thing! They were necessary to help your baby grow and develop.

Before long, though, you might start wondering how long it will take to “bounce back” or what steps you can take to recover. Here are a few things to keep in mind.

If you had a vaginal birth, you will be sore in the area between your vagina and rectum. This area stretches and may tear during labor. It may be more, sore if you have had an episiotomy. This is a cut made at the opening of the vagina to help deliver your baby.

Taking a Sitz bath can help soothe the pain. A Sitz bath is a warm, shallow bath used for healing and cleansing. If you, like many new moms, have hemorrhoids caused by the strain of the contractions and pushing during labor and delivery, apply witch hazel to the hemorrhoids to soothe. You can keep it cool in the refrigerator, then apply with cotton balls.

Constipation can worsen hemorrhoids, so if you are experiencing this talk with your doctor about how to manage it. Kegel exercises strengthen the muscles in the pelvic area. They may also help reduce leakage of urine, which sometimes happens after giving birth. Ask your doctor when you should start these exercises.

If you had a C-section, take it easy. Rest when possible and try to keep everything that you and your baby may need within reach. You may be worried about the extra weight you gained during your pregnancy. Don't expect or try to lose the extra pounds right away. It took 40 weeks to gain the weight, so it is not realistic to expect it to be gone in just a few weeks or months!

Many moms will lose about half their baby weight within six weeks of delivery and return to their pre-baby weight by six months. Breastfeeding your baby can also help you drop pounds. While breastfeeding, you need to eat about 500 extra calories a day to keep up your energy and provide adequate milk to your baby.

Focus on eating lean proteins, whole grains, fruits and vegetables. Make sure to drink plenty of water to stay hydrated. Don't start exercising until you get the okay from your doctor. This is usually around six weeks after delivery. It's a good idea to ask your doctor which exercises are safe as you heal.

Walking, yoga, swimming, cardio and even mom and baby exercise classes are a good start. As you recover from having your baby, remember to take it slow and don't push yourself too hard. When you take care of yourself you can give yourself some much needed attention and make it easier for you to take care of and enjoy your baby.