

Understanding and Preventing Postpartum Hemorrhage

Congratulations on your new baby! You may experience some bleeding after delivery and that is normal. But too much bleeding can be dangerous.

This is called a postpartum hemorrhage. If you think you may be experiencing a postpartum hemorrhage, get medical help immediately.

Most postpartum hemorrhages are caused by uterine atony. This occurs when the uterus does not contract after a baby and placenta are delivered, so the blood vessels remain open.

Other causes of postpartum hemorrhage include: Retained placenta, or when a piece of the placenta remains in the uterus; Uterine inversion, or when the uterus turns inside out; Or lacerations and tears in the vagina or cervix.

If bleeding happens in the first 24 hours after delivery it is a primary postpartum hemorrhage.

If the bleeding happens between 24 hours and 12 weeks after your baby is born, it is called a secondary postpartum hemorrhage.

There are several conditions that raise your risk of having a postpartum hemorrhage. These include:

Women have pushed for a long, long time. Women who have either had very long labors or very rapid labors. Ironically, a very large baby or twins or triplets also puts a mom at risk for having a postpartum hemorrhage. And while that list isn't inclusive those are some of the most common reasons it can happen.

A Postpartum hemorrhage is a medical emergency. If you experience any of these symptoms after giving birth, call 911 immediately: Soaking more than one pad in an hour for two hours straight. Any amount of bleeding that is accompanied by feeling lightheaded or dizzy. Passing out. Chest pain or trouble breathing.

If your doctor suspects a postpartum hemorrhage, she will perform several tests to determine if you have postpartum hemorrhage.

These might include a blood test, a pelvic exam, or an ultrasound to check for problems with the placenta or your uterus.

If you are diagnosed with postpartum hemorrhage, treatment can include medications or uterine massage to help your uterus contract, removal of placenta pieces, either manually or through surgery, IV fluids and possible blood transfusion, surgery to repair tears, or in severe cases hysterectomy.

Another treatment option may include Uterine artery embolization which slows down or stops blood flow to your uterus.

Postpartum hemorrhage is very serious, but quickly detecting and treating the cause of bleeding can lead to a full recovery.

If you think you may be bleeding too much or have any questions or concerns talk to your doctor right away.