

Postpartum Care: Changes in Your Body After Delivery

For nine months your body has been changing to meet the needs of your growing baby. Your uterus has been expanding and your breasts are preparing to feed your baby. Now, after the birth of your baby, your body will go through more changes.

After delivery, your uterus will begin to recover and shrink back to its pre-pregnancy size. Empty your bladder frequently to help your uterus contract and reduce your risk of cramping and excessive bleeding. As your uterus contracts, you may experience after pains that feel like menstrual cramps. Breastfeeding helps stimulate these contractions so the pain may coincide with feedings.

“You will notice more cramping every time you nurse because that causes those uterine contractions which keeps you from having excess bleeding so it’s a good thing, but it hurts a little bit.”

In the hospital, your healthcare provider will check your belly often to make sure your uterus is shrinking. It will continue reducing for approximately six to eight weeks before it returns to its pre-pregnancy size. For several weeks after birth, you’ll experience a vaginal discharge of blood from your uterus called Lochia, whether you delivered vaginally or had a cesarean section. This is a result of the uterus cleansing and healing itself. Be sure to wear sanitary pads, but do not use tampons or douche.

Lochia is normally heavy and red for the first eight hours after birth; then it turns to a darker red and may contain clots up to a half dollar size for three or four days and gradually becomes pinker until about day ten; then a yellowish/clear discharge may continue for three to six weeks after birth.

Lochia smells earthy but should not have a strong or unpleasant odor. If your lochia smells foul, contact your healthcare provider; this could indicate an infection. Also, call your healthcare provider if the amount is heavier than your normal period or if the bleeding is bright red.

As you recover from labor, you may also experience increased urination and night sweats after delivery. This is your body’s natural way of releasing retained fluid. During your pregnancy, your body has also been preparing to feed your newborn. Immediately after birth your breasts are ready to give your baby all the nutrients he needs to grow and thrive.

The first milk your breasts produce is a thick, highly nutritious substance called colostrum. Colostrum is the perfect food for your child’s first few days of life and your body creates it in just the right amount for your newborn’s tiny stomach.

Within three to four days, your baby’s sucking stimulates a hormone within you that signals your body to produce breast milk. This is referred to as your milk “coming in.”

Some women describe a tingling feeling in their nipples when their milk begins to flow. You may, or may not, experience this sensation. This feeling is caused by the milk ejection reflex or “let-down.” Let-down may feel odd, but it shouldn’t be uncomfortable.

Continued nursing stimulates milk production. During the postpartum period your body will go through many changes. All of these changes will help you return to your pre-pregnancy health and help provide your baby with all he needs to grow and be healthy.