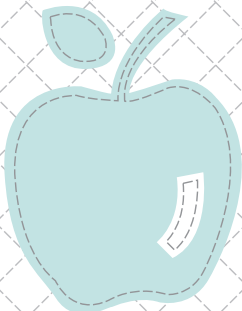
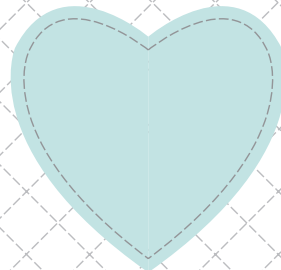
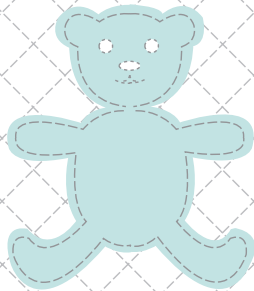


*Early Care for Mother,  
Baby and Family*



A NEW LIFE



# Mother Care

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The first few days after your baby's birth are filled with excitement, adjustments, and questions. In hospital or at home, your nurse will help you as you and your baby get to know one another.

After you return home, you can continue to get information and support by contacting your local Public Health Services office.



**W**hether you've had a vaginal or cesarean birth, you go through many changes in the hours and days following your baby's birth. Physically, your body recovers from childbirth and, over a period of about six weeks, gradually returns to its non-pregnant state. Emotionally, you begin getting used to the idea of being a mother and begin getting to know and love your new baby.

## *The First Few Days*

Rest and time with your baby will help to ease you through these changes.

While you're in the hospital, your temperature, pulse, and blood pressure will be checked. Your abdomen will be checked to see that your uterus is firm and is returning to its normal size. If you've had an episiotomy, it will be checked to see that it's healing well.

As your uterus returns to its pre-pregnancy size, you may feel sharp, crampy pains in your abdomen. These are called after pains. If you're breastfeeding, you are especially likely to notice them while your baby is nursing. The baby's sucking causes the uterus to contract and helps it return to normal. Many new mothers find that the breathing patterns they used during labour can help them to handle the discomfort of after pains as well.

You'll be asked about the amount and colour of the discharge from your vagina. This is called "lochia" and looks much like a menstrual period. For the first few days after childbirth, lochia is bright red, heavy, and may have clots. Over the next few days it changes to a brownish or pinkish discharge and finally becomes light yellow or clear. This process can take a few weeks.

The nurses will also be reminding you to urinate, and helping you to do so if you need it. They'll also ask if you've had a bowel movement and urge you to drink lots of water to prevent constipation.

Although you need rest, you also need to move around and will be urged to get up and walk and begin gentle exercises soon after childbirth. A combination of rest and activity will help give you the energy you need to take care of your baby and yourself.

Talk with your nurse or doctor if you have any questions about your body, your baby or your new family.

## *Breast Care*

**F**or the first few days after birth, your breasts will feel soft and will produce colostrum — a sticky, yellowish fluid.

Your milk usually comes in about 2 to 4 days postpartum. Your breasts will feel warm, firm, and tender. If your breasts become very full and sore, you can ease them by nursing your baby. If the baby isn't interested when you need relief, you can express milk from your breasts. This is especially effective when done in a warm shower. You can also use warm compresses to ease the discomfort.

When bathing, wash your breasts with plain water only. Do not use soap. Pat your nipples dry. Air dry them after each feeding.

Prevent dryness and irritation by rubbing a small amount of breast milk onto your nipples and the area around them (areola).

Wear a well-fitted cotton bra with non-elastic straps. It should not have any kind of plastic or rubber lining.

You'll find more information about breastfeeding your baby in **Breastfeeding Basics and Loving Care: Birth to 6 Months**.

**Even if you decide not to breastfeed, your breasts will continue to produce milk.**

You may be given a breast binder, or you can wear a good, well-fitted supportive bra to help you feel more comfortable.

Mothers who choose not to breastfeed do not need medication to dry up the milk.

Stimulating your breasts will cause them to produce milk. Avoid

- rubbing with face cloth, hands, or clothing
- allowing hot water to fall on your breasts while showering; shower with your back to the water

If your breasts become sore and swollen, you'll be given ice packs and pain relievers to ease your discomfort. The milk in your breasts will reabsorb into your system. Try not to stimulate or express milk.



**S**oon after your baby's birth — usually about 2 to 3 days — you may find that you don't feel as happy as you might think you should. You may feel tired, moody, irritable, tearful, helpless, or overwhelmed.

These feelings are called “postpartum blues.”

These feelings are normal. Many new mothers feel this way and most find that these feelings pass quickly. Resting and spending time with your baby will help. You can find more information on postpartum blues in **Loving Care: Parents and Families**.

## *Postpartum Blues*

### **Care of the perineum**

Many women have some discomfort in the perineum right after the baby is born. Whether or not you have stitches from a tear or episiotomy, your perineum is likely to be swollen and sore.

To feel more comfortable, try

**Ice packs:** Ice packs wrapped in towels will help reduce swelling and discomfort in your perineum.

**Warm baths:** Soak at least 6 times a day in warm water. Do pelvic floor exercises while soaking. You may find the use of epsom salts or baking soda will help relieve your discomfort.

**Rinsing carefully after going to the bathroom:** Pour warm water over your perineum with a squeeze bottle while sitting on the toilet. Pat dry with clean wipes going from front to back. This keeps the area clean and prevents infection.

**Sitting carefully:** Sit down on both hips evenly. Tighten your pelvic floor muscles as you lower yourself. Relax them while sitting. Tighten them again as you get up. Sit on a firm, rather than a soft, seat.

**Pelvic floor exercises:** Start doing these soon after delivery. Tightening and relaxing your pelvic floor will speed up healing.

## *Your Body after Childbirth*

## Hemorrhoids

The pressure of bearing down during labour can cause hemorrhoids or, if you had them during pregnancy, can cause them to feel swollen and sore.

You can relieve the discomfort by

- using an ice pack wrapped in towels
- soaking in a warm tub
- keeping your bowel movements soft. Drink lots of fluids (6 to 8 glasses a day) and eat fruits, whole grains, and other high-fibre foods

You can find more information about relieving the discomfort of hemorrhoids in Relief for Common Discomforts in the Nine Months of Changes section.

Hemorrhoids can be very uncomfortable, but they usually go away once your body recovers from pregnancy and birth.

## *After the First Few Days*

**D**uring the first 6 weeks after your baby's birth, your body is going through many changes.

- Your uterus is getting smaller and returning to its non-pregnant size.
- While you're breastfeeding, your body is getting used to making milk.
- You're losing the extra fluid your body produced while you were pregnant.
- Your hormones are changing from the high levels of pregnancy to a non-pregnant or breastfeeding level.
- You're recovering from the physical effort of giving birth. If you've had a cesarean, you also need to recover from surgery. If you've had a vaginal birth, you may have stitches from an episiotomy to heal.

You may have started to deal with these changes during your hospital stay, but they will continue for a while after you return home. Remember that you were pregnant for 9 months. Don't be surprised if it takes a while for your body to recover and feel "normal" again.

Most women have a postpartum checkup about 6 weeks after giving birth. Your doctor will check to be sure your uterus has returned to its normal size and shape and that any stitches or incisions have healed. You'll also have your blood pressure taken and may be asked to give samples of blood and urine for lab tests.

This checkup gives you a chance to talk to your doctor about your questions or concerns. If you haven't already done so, this is a good time to talk about birth control.

### **Vaginal Discharge (Lochia)**

This vaginal discharge will continue for several weeks, gradually changing from bright red to a pinkish or brownish colour, to clear. It's a good idea to have a supply of sanitary napkins on hand when you come home from the hospital.

If your lochia changes from a small, brownish discharge back to a bright red flow, this may mean that you are being too active. Try to rest and take things easier for a while.

Talk to your doctor if your lochia suddenly becomes much heavier, has clots, or smells bad.

### **Getting Your Period Again**

While you breastfeed your baby, it may be between 4 and 12 months after delivery before your period returns again.

If you're formula feeding, your period will probably return between 6 and 12 weeks after you have your baby. Your first period after delivery may be heavier and last longer than your period normally does.

When your period does return, it may be irregular for a while. This is normal. You should know that you can get pregnant during this time and should be prepared with whatever birth control method you have chosen. You can find information on birth control in **Loving Care: Parents and Families**.

## Postpartum Exercises

After childbirth, healthy activity will help your body return to normal.

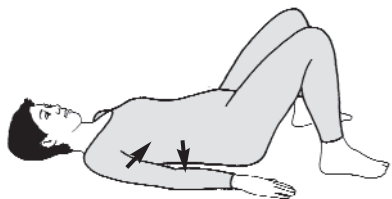
Exercise will

- speed up healing
- improve your circulation
- strengthen your muscles
- keep your pelvic organs toned
- help relieve hemorrhoids
- help your bowels and bladder to work well
- give you energy
- help you to feel better and more relaxed



If your hospital offers postpartum exercise classes, try to attend them. You'll feel better, and it's the easiest way to learn the exercises.

The exercises in this section will be familiar because you've done them as part of your prenatal program. Start them as soon as possible after birth and continue at home. You'll find information on this in the Healthy Activity section.



Don't strain yourself. Start gently and allow your muscles to slowly get stronger. Start by doing each exercise 3 to 5 times. Slowly increase to 5 to 10 times each.

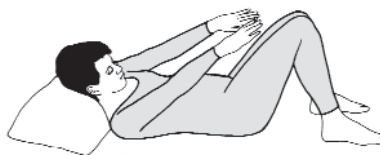
### On the day of delivery — in bed

- foot and ankle circling
- pelvic tilt (lying on your back with your knees bent)
- pelvic floor exercises



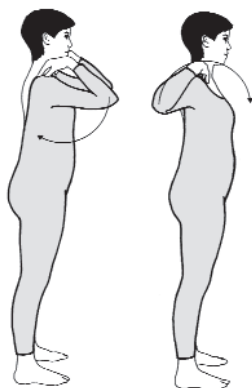
### After 24 hours add

- abdominal tightening (lying on your back with your knees bent)



### After two days add

- curl ups —before you do curl-ups, check to see if you have an abdominal separation as you learned in Healthy Activity. If you do, be sure to support your abdominal muscles while exercising.
- diagonal curl-ups
- alternate arm stretches
- elbow circles



You may find it helpful to continue practising relaxation techniques as part of your exercise program. Relaxation is as important now as it was during your pregnancy.



## *After a Cesarean Birth*

**A**fter a cesarean, your care in hospital will be bit different. If you have questions, your doctor and maternity nurses are there to answer them.

You may also find that you have feelings you didn't expect, especially if you had been planning for a vaginal birth. Talking about how you feel with your partner, your doctor, your maternity nurse, or someone you trust is a good way to begin working out your feelings.

### **Physical care**

After a cesarean birth you will have pain from your incision. If you need pain medication, your doctor will order it for you.

For the first 24 hours after the birth, you will have an IV to make sure you get enough fluids and a bladder catheter to help you to urinate. You'll be offered food and drink and encouraged to eat if you feel like it.

To make it easier to have a bowel movement after surgery, drink plenty of liquids (6 to 8 glasses a day) and walk as much as possible. Your doctor may suggest a stool softener or mild laxative. When you have a bowel movement, support your incision with your hands while you bear down gently.

### **Breathing exercises**

Breathing exercises are an important first step in your recovery. Beginning them soon after surgery and continuing for the next several days will help to keep your lungs clear and make your recovery easier and faster.

When doing any breathing exercise, support your incision with your hands or a pillow.

At least once an hour:

Take 2 or 3 slow, deep breaths. Feel your chest expand.

Huff. Huffing is like saying "ha" quickly. Your mouth is open and your jaw is relaxed. You tighten your abdomen and force the air from your lungs.



### **Care of your incision**

For 2 to 6 days your incision will be covered with a bandage, which your nurse will change. Your incision will be cleaned every day with peroxide to help it heal and prevent infection. If your incision is healing well, most doctors encourage you to shower as soon as your bandage is removed.

Depending on the kind of stitches in your incision, they will either dissolve or be removed a few days after the surgery. Some doctors use metal clips or staples to close the incision. These will also need to be removed a few days after surgery.

Your incision will be sore at first and, as it heals, may feel numb, itchy, tight, or tender. This is a normal part of healing.

Your doctor will tell you how to take care of your incision after you leave the hospital. Usually, your incision won't require any special care after you go home.

During feedings, place a pillow between your baby and the incision. You'll both be more comfortable.

### **Rest**

After a cesarean birth, your body is recovering from both childbirth and surgery. This does not happen overnight. Give yourself time to regain your strength.

Rest is an important part of your recovery. Try to rest when your baby sleeps. Accept help when it's offered. Limit visitors. Try putting a sign on your door — “Mother and Baby Sleeping.”



**A**fter surgery, activity is as important to your recovery as rest. And the sooner you begin, the better you'll feel.

You should begin breathing exercises (see page 197) within the first few hours after your cesarean and continue them throughout your stay in hospital.

Within the first 24 hours after birth, you'll be helped and encouraged to sit on the side of your bed, to stand, to sit in a chair, and to take short walks. This may be uncomfortable and seem like a lot to ask of you so soon after surgery, but these early activities are important for your recovery.

Moving about and exercising will

- speed up healing
- help relieve gas
- help your circulation
- help your bowels and bladder return to normal
- give you more energy
- help you to feel better and more relaxed

If your hospital offers a postpartum exercise class, try to attend. It will give you a chance to move around and will help you to find ways to ease back into normal activity.

The exercises in this section will be familiar, because you've done most of them as part of your prenatal program. Start them as soon as possible after birth and continue at home. You'll find information about this in the Healthy Activity section.

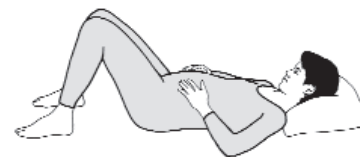
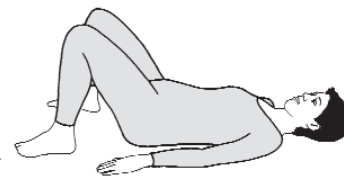
Don't strain yourself. Start gently and allow your muscles to slowly get stronger. Start by doing each exercise 3 to 5 times. Slowly increase to 5 to 10 times each.

### Days 1 and 2

Do these lying in bed

- foot and ankle circling
- pelvic floor exercises
- pelvic tilt (lying on your back with your knees bent)
- abdominal tightening (lying on your back with your knees bent)
- leg bending:
  - lie in bed with head and shoulders raised on pillows
  - bend your right knee, keeping your left knee straight
  - bend and straighten your left knee several times
  - change legs and repeat
- bridge

## *Postpartum Exercises after a Cesarean Birth*



### Days 3 and 4

Do these sitting or standing

- foot and ankle circling
- pelvic floor exercises
- pelvic tilt
- abdominal tightening

Do this lying down

- leg bending

## *Vaginal Birth after a Cesarean (VBAC)*

**W**hat about birth next time? If you've had a cesarean birth, you should consider a vaginal birth with future babies.

A vaginal birth after a cesarean (VBAC) is usually considered if

- your next pregnancy is normal and uncomplicated
- the incision in your uterus from your previous cesarean runs from side to side rather than up and down. Remember that the skin incision may be up and down even though the incision in the uterus runs from side to side.
- you are carrying only one baby, not twins or triplets
- the reason for your previous cesarean doesn't happen again. For example, if you had your cesarean because your baby was lying sideways in your uterus, then as long as this baby's position is normal, you could deliver vaginally

A VBAC is safe, although there is a small chance that the uterus could tear along the old incision during labour. Think of it this way. Among 1,000 women in Nova Scotia who have a VBAC, 2 or 3 will develop a tear in the uterus during labour. If this happens you will need a cesarean section. On the other hand, a vaginal birth

- has a lower risk of infection and bleeding
- has fewer complications from anesthesia
- requires a shorter stay in hospital
- allows for a faster and easier recovery

Talk with your doctor if you'd like more information about a vaginal birth after a cesarean.

Not all hospitals can offer vaginal birth after a cesarean. Talk with your doctor about what's available in your community or about the possibility of going to a hospital that offers this option for your next birth.

**C**hildbirth has an impact on all parts of your life. It affects you

- physically, as your body recovers from the stress of pregnancy and you begin to deal with the physical demands of caring for a new baby
- emotionally, as you swing between joy, excitement, fear, confusion, and love. Your feelings are very strong and change very quickly
- socially, as you begin to realize that your role has changed. You may be looking at conflicts between your new role as mother and your other roles in the workplace and in your family
- psychologically, as you begin to grow into your role as mother and to accept your new responsibilities as a parent. You are leaving behind one stage of your development and beginning another. It's a time of change, and while change is often rewarding, it's not often easy

All of these changes and stresses seem to come at once, and are all mixed together. You may not know exactly why you feel so overwhelmed, you just know that you do. And you may be very surprised that you feel this way, especially if you had a happy pregnancy and were looking forward to becoming a mother.

All of these conflicting feelings also come at a time when you're so tired that it's hard to think straight. Bone-deep tiredness is what many mothers remember most about their first few weeks of parenting, and everything seems worse when you're tired.

Talking with your partner about your feelings is especially important now. If you feel tired, or lonely, or resentful, say so. You may find that he feels the same way. Talk about whatever's bothering you. You need to get things out in the open before you can start sorting them out.

Talking with other new mothers can also help to reassure you that you're not the only one who feels this way.

Your life will sort itself out. Your baby will begin to sleep at regular times. You'll get the hang of bathing and dressing and feeding. You and your partner will be able to have a conversation without the baby crying or one of you falling asleep. And one day your baby will smile just for you, and you'll think that maybe motherhood isn't so bad after all.



## *Tiredness*

**I**t's hard to believe that looking after a tiny baby can take so much time and energy. Many new mothers spend their first few weeks feeling very tired.

Here are ways to help yourself cope

- Get as much rest as you can.  
Nap when your baby naps. Unplug the phone. Post a note on your door: "Mother and Baby sleeping. Do not disturb."
- Get organized.
- Keep things simple. Think about all the things you have to do. Divide them into "must do" and "should do" lists. Concentrate on the "must do's." Don't do anything you don't have to do.
- Do things when you have the energy, not when you think it's "time."  
This may mean setting the table for dinner at 10 am or making your lunch right after breakfast.
- Talk with your partner about ways to share the load.
- Recognize that it may take longer than you expected to get organized and work out new routines for yourself, your baby, and the rest of the family.
- Get as much help as you can.
- If people offer to help, accept.
- If someone asks you if there's a baby gift you'd really like, consider asking for a day's housecleaning service, a week's diaper service, a prepared dinner, an evening's babysitting.
- Be realistic.

Know that it's OK if you can't do everything as quickly as you did before you had a baby to care for. You may find that it takes twice as long to do housework or laundry.

Try not to measure the work you are doing at home against what you may have accomplished at work before you had your baby. The two are completely different and really can't be compared.

- Build a support network.

Look for other new mothers to talk with, exchange child care, or give one another a break.

Check to see if your neighbourhood has a parent drop-in centre. Some churches or community groups sponsor mother-baby groups or exercise programs.

- Take care of yourself.

This is not selfish. It's absolutely necessary.

Try to arrange for time to be alone, to go for a walk, or take a relaxing bath.

Stay physically active. Do postpartum exercises. You may feel so tired that this seems silly, but exercise will actually increase your energy.

Continue to eat a healthy, well-balanced diet.

Do something for yourself every day. Wash your hair, watch a TV show, read, talk to a friend. Pamper yourself. If you find a way to spend some time meeting your own needs, you'll be less likely to mind the time you spend meeting everyone else's.

Pat yourself on the back and give yourself credit for doing a good job.



Public Health Services

[www.gov.ns.ca/hpp](http://www.gov.ns.ca/hpp)

