

Taking care of yourself

In the first days following a caesarean section



Pregnancy and childbirth bring significant physical and emotional changes. It's normal to go through a period of adjustment in the days following the birth of your child. This fact sheet will help you take care of yourself after a caesarean section (C-section).

When will the pain go away?

After a C-section, the pain can last several days to a few weeks. If, after you've received the necessary care or medication, your pain is getting worse rather than better, consult a healthcare professional.

What medications should I take?

Pain medication such as acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol) and an anti-inflammatory medication such as ibuprofen (e.g. Advil or Motrin) can provide relief after you return home. These medications are available in pharmacies. You can take them as needed, even if you're breastfeeding.



How do I take care of my incision?

Take a shower every day, wash the incision with unscented soap and water, and dry it well. When the staples are removed, Steri-Strips are placed over the incision. You can remove them after 7 to 10 days.



After the staples are removed, the incision is covered with the Steri-Strips.

What will my incision look like in the days following the caesarean?

Your incision may be numb for some time because nerves have been cut. Don't worry, sensation will gradually return over the next months.

A small area of redness, sometimes with a clear watery and odourless liquid, may appear on the scar. This is called inflammation. Don't worry, it's normal. It will gradually disappear as the incision heals.

Starting in the 6th week, take 5 minutes a day to gently massage your scar. Make circular movements on each side of the scar without pulling on it. This reduces discomfort. See the fact sheet [Taking care of my scars with massage](#).

What are the possible complications?

If you have one or more of the following symptoms within 15 days of giving birth, see your doctor or go to the emergency room:

- > Heavy vaginal bleeding (needing 1 sanitary napkin per hour) that doesn't decrease over time.
- > Vaginal bleeding that contains blood clots larger than a golf ball.
- > Blood loss with a strong odour.
- > Severe pain in the abdomen or genital area that increases despite care.
- > Pain in one leg with swelling.
- > Difficulty breathing.
- > Fever of 38°C (100.4°F) or higher, 48 hours or more after your milk comes in.

In addition, although infection in a C-section incision is rare, watch for the following symptoms. If you have any of them, contact your doctor:

- Pain in the incision that gets worse and persists.
- A red area, warm to the touch, around the incision.
- Hardness around the incision (induration).
- Swelling around the incision.
- Discharge with pus (thick yellow or green liquid).
- Muscle pain throughout the body.

What happens when my milk comes in?

After childbirth, breasts generally become heavier and more sensitive. You may have a fever (38°C or 100.4°F) for 24 to 48 hours. There is no need to worry, milk production is usually accompanied by breast swelling between the 2nd and 6th day after delivery.

For some women, this pressure in the breasts can be uncomfortable, but this discomfort lasts only a day or two.

How do I take care of my breasts while the milk is coming in?

Here are some tips to relieve pressure in your breasts and reduce the risk of engorgement.

If you're breastfeeding

- > Have frequent skin-to-skin contact to encourage your baby to suck.
- > Place your baby's crib or bassinette in your room, to be more convenient.
- > Offer more frequent feedings: at least 8 times in 24 hours while the milk is coming in, for a couple of days.
- > **Before breastfeeding**, apply heat (hot water compress or hot shower) to your breasts as needed for 1 to 2 minutes. This stimulates the flow of milk.
- > **During the feeding**, make sure your baby is swallowing the milk well and suckles until satisfied. Also remember to breastfeed from both breasts or express your milk. If the baby tends to fall asleep, rouse the baby and put him or her in a diaper.
- > **After breastfeeding**, apply cold compresses to your breasts. You can also take a pain medication or an anti-inflammatory. If your breasts are engorged, you can apply ice (see box below).



You can also massage them between feedings to express a few drops of milk.

If you apply ice

- Use an ice pack or a bag of frozen vegetables.
- Do this for 20 minutes and repeat as needed with a 10-minute break to avoid frostbite.



What precautions should I take afterwards?

You can wear a bra if that's more comfortable for you. Choose a wireless model that doesn't leave marks and doesn't compress your breasts.

Keep your breasts as dry as possible. Use cotton or paper nursing pads without plastic lining. Change them regularly.

If your nipples are cracked or painful, you can consult a nurse at your CLSC or a lactation specialist, who will check that the baby is latching properly. You can also apply a drop of milk at the end of the feeding.

The best way to prevent infections is to wash your hands before each feeding.

What if I'm not breastfeeding?

- > Apply cold to your breasts instead. You can also take a pain medication or an anti-inflammatory.
- > In the shower, avoid spraying hot water directly onto your breasts.
- > Wear a good bra.

What are the signs to watch for in my breasts?

Consult a health professional if you have:

- a fever over 38°C (100.4°F), 48 hours or more after your milk comes in
- localized pain and redness in one or both breasts

How can I avoid constipation?

- > Gradually eat more fibre-rich foods (whole grain cereal products, legumes, fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds).
- > Choose fresh and complete foods rather than ultra-processed foods.
- > Eat prunes or drink prune juice.
- > Drink at least 2 litres of water per day.
- > Go to the toilet as soon as you feel the need.
- > Gradually resume physical activities. Take walks, for example.
- > Massage your stomach clockwise.



It's normal not to have a bowel movement for the first few days after delivery. There may be various reasons, such as fear of pain and being less physically active. If the problem continues, talk to a health professional.

How do I look after my emotional health?

After a C-section, your emotional well-being is important. Did you have expectations about giving birth or being a mother? Don't hesitate to talk about your emotions with your partner or your family and friends.

You need rest to recover both physically and emotionally. Take advantage of any time when your baby is sleeping or with your partner to rest.

Give yourself time to adjust to your role as a mother and to get used to this life change. Good communication with your partner is helpful to better understand and respect what both of you are going through.

Feel free to discuss any concerns or worries with a health professional.

Who can I contact for help or to ask questions?

At the CHUM Birthing Centre, contact the Perinatal Clinic, Monday to Friday, between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., at 514-890-8000, ext. 36396.

Outside of these hours, call the Postpartum Unit at 514-890-8426.

You can also discuss your questions with a perinatal nurse at your neighbourhood Local Community Service Centre (CLSC), or call Info-Santé at 8-1-1.



NOTEPAD



Questions



Resource people and contacts



USEFUL RESOURCES

You received the guide *From Tiny Tot to Toddler* at your first medical visit. You can also consult it online:

> www.inspq.qc.ca/en/tiny-tot/

PregnancyInfo.ca:

An information site provided by the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada. See the postpartum section.

> pregnancyinfo.ca

Parents Line:

> **1 800 361-5085**

(24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Breastfeeding resources: La Leche League

> **1 514 842-4781**

> lllc.ca

To learn more about pregnancy, delivery, or follow-up care, visit our internet site.



Videos, other fact sheets, and more resources are available at:

centredesnaissanceschum.com

The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal
chumontreal.qc.ca