

Taking care of yourself

In the weeks following childbirth



After giving birth, it's normal that you would need to recover physically and emotionally for a few weeks. The time this takes varies from woman to woman. This fact sheet offers advice on how to look after yourself in the first few weeks after your delivery.

What kind of follow-up will I have after giving birth?

The doctor who followed your pregnancy will see you again about 6 weeks after delivery. This is to check on your health and answer any questions or concerns you may have.

When will my periods start again?

This varies from one woman to another.

For breastfeeding mothers, periods often return later. They may return when feedings are less frequent or when the mother stops breastfeeding altogether.

For mothers who don't breastfeed and don't take oral contraceptives, periods usually restart 6 to 12 weeks after delivery.

Why am I less interested in having sex?

It's normal to have less sexual desire after giving birth. This may be due to:

- fatigue
- new responsibilities
- hormonal changes
- pain and the fear of pain
- pain associated with the healing incision
- tension in your pelvic floor muscles

When can I have sex again?

When to resume sexual relations will depend on each couple. The timing may be influenced by when the bleeding stops, the healing of the perineum, and your level of fatigue. It is best not to put anything into the vagina for a few weeks, at least until the bleeding stops.

Talk with your partner about your expectations and decide together when the best time is. The important thing is to listen to each other and to be emotionally ready.



How will sex be different?

The natural lubrication of the vagina may be decreased in the first few months after childbirth and during breastfeeding. You can use an unscented lubricant if you wish.

If you have persistent discomfort or pain, consult a health professional.

When can I resume my physical activities?

You'll need some time to regain your usual energy.

After you leave the hospital, it's advisable to rest and take care of yourself and your baby. Two to three weeks after the birth, you can gradually return to your usual activities in the home.

As soon as you feel fit, don't hesitate to go for walks, do yoga, swim, etc. These are good ways to get back into shape gently. Resuming other sports activity will depend on you and on your fitness level before giving birth.

Decide on the time that's right for you. If in doubt, consult your doctor or a physiotherapist.

Also, if you have bladder weakness, it's best not to do impact sports (jumping, jogging, etc.). Instead, do exercises to strengthen your pelvic floor.



What precautions should I take when resuming physical activities?

During pregnancy and childbirth, your abdominal muscles and the base of your pelvis (pelvic floor) are under great strain. It's important to strengthen these muscles to prevent back injuries and urine leakage.

Before resuming your sports activities, do the suggested postnatal exercises regularly. Check out the exercise sheets and videos on the [Birthing Centre](#) website (see the end of this fact sheet). It's also advisable before resuming sports to see a physiotherapist specialising in perineal re-education.

It's important to resume any sports activity slowly. During pregnancy, a hormone called relaxin is produced in large quantities. This hormone can increase the risk of tendon and joint injuries, especially during intense physical activity (running, downhill skiing, tennis, soccer, etc.).

If in doubt, consult a physiotherapist or ask your doctor for advice.

What precautions should be taken after a C-section?

It takes about 6 weeks for the C-section incision to heal. During this time, take the following precautions:

- Avoid carrying heavy loads. Don't carry anything heavier than your baby.
- Avoid strenuous housework.
- Support your belly with your hands or a small pillow when you change positions and when you cough or sneeze.

What precautions should I take if I'm breastfeeding?

- If it's more comfortable for you, do your physical activities when your breasts are lighter (after breastfeeding or expressing milk).
- Choose a bra that provides good support and doesn't compress the breasts.

When will I lose weight?

During pregnancy, weight is gained over several months. After giving birth, weight loss should also be gradual. Be patient and adopt a healthy lifestyle. Most new mothers lose weight without too much effort in the first year. Breastfeeding your baby helps you lose weight.



Avoid strict weight-loss diets and medications that promote weight loss. They can weaken you and decrease your energy.

How can I get back to my previous weight in a healthy way?

Here are some tips:

> Eat a balanced diet

Eat a variety of healthy foods every day:

- lots of fruits and vegetables
- foods with protein at each meal
- snacks (including at least 2 portions of dairy products or substitutes every day)
- whole grain cereal products

Drink water rather than juice. Choose 1% milk or plant-based milk rather than 2% milk.

Consult Canada's Food Guide for more information.

> Drink water regularly

Always keep a bottle nearby. Drink water at meals and with snacks. Your body can perceive a lack of water as a feeling of hunger. Be creative! To make water taste better, infuse it with fruit (lemon, orange, watermelon, etc.), fresh herbs (mint, rosemary, etc.) or ginger.

> Don't skip meals

Eat 3 meals a day. Skipping meals often disrupts the signals that tell you when you're hungry and when you've eaten enough. This leads you to eat more. Pack snacks with a source of protein, such as fruit with nuts, crackers with cheese, or yogurt.

> Eat slowly

Your brain receives the signal that you're no longer hungry about 20 minutes after you start eating. If you eat too quickly, you'll swallow a lot of food before you realize you're no longer hungry.

> Move

After resuming your daily activities, do 15 to 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity at least 5 times a week. Increase the intensity according to your tolerance level.

> Avoid losing weight too quickly

Don't set unrealistic weight loss goals. Instead, change your lifestyle habits. That's what will have a lasting impact on the number on the scale. Losing weight quickly doesn't guarantee long-term success.



What's happening to my emotions?

The fatigue and hormonal upheaval associated with childbirth can cause mood changes. You may feel anxious, sad, guilty, and other feelings. This is called the baby blues (or postpartum blues). It usually lasts from a few hours to a few days. See the fact sheet Baby blues and psychological well-being.

If you're still feeling these emotions after 15 days, or if you feel unhappy and lack interest in your baby, you may be experiencing postpartum depression.

Don't wait for the situation to get worse. Act as soon as possible by seeking help from your doctor or a psychologist.



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.:

> **514 890-8000, poste 36396**

or the Psychology Service:

> **514 890-8000, poste 36277**

Outside of these hours, call the Postpartum Unit:

> **514 890-8426**

Physiotherapy Service:

> **514 890-8301**

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**.



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/

Parents Line:

> **1 800 361-5085**

(24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Canada's Food Guide:

> food-guide.canada.ca/en

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



Questions

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

