

Taking care of yourself

The first days after giving birth



Pregnancy and childbirth can bring significant physical and emotional changes. It's normal to go through an adjustment period in the days after the birth of your child. This fact sheet will help you take care of yourself after your delivery.

When will the pain stop?

The pain of childbirth decreases over time. But for some women, it can last for a few days.

If you have had stitches, the area may remain sensitive for a few weeks.

What medications can I take?

A painkiller such as acetaminophen (Tylenol, for example) and an anti-inflammatory such as ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin, for example) can relieve your discomfort after you return home. These are available in pharmacies. You can take them as needed, even if you are breastfeeding.



Should I be worried about bleeding?

Bleeding and blood clots are normal after childbirth. How much, and for how long, can vary greatly. Blood loss will decrease over time, first light red, then pink, then brown, and finally yellowish. For some women, it stops after 10 days. For others, it can last up to 6 weeks.

What are the possible complications?

Hemorrhage or infection after childbirth is very rare.

However, 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 bleeding (needing 1 sanitary napkin per hour) that doesn't decrease over time.
- > Bleeding that contains blood clots larger than a golf ball.
- > Severe abdominal or genital pain that gets worse despite treatment.
- > Blood loss with a strong odour.
- > Pain in one leg with swelling.
- > Difficulty breathing.
- > A fever of 38°C (100.4°F) or higher, 48 hours or more after your milk comes in.



How can I promote healing of the perineum (muscles between the anus and vulva)?

After giving birth, follow these good hygiene practices:

- > Wash your hands before and after using the toilet.
- > When wiping yourself, pat gently from front to back.
- > Wash your vulva with warm water and unscented soap twice a day and after each bowel movement.
- > Dry your vulva well before getting dressed again.
- > Avoid vaginal douches, scented soaps, oils, and bubble baths.
- > Avoid public pools, baths, and spas until your first follow-up visit after delivery, about 6 weeks later.
- > For your comfort or to relieve itching, bathe the perineum in cold water for 10 to 15 minutes. You can also apply ice to it.
- > Don't use a tampon.



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 tension 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 tension in your breasts and reduce the risk of engorgement.

If you are 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 painkiller 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 painkiller 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?

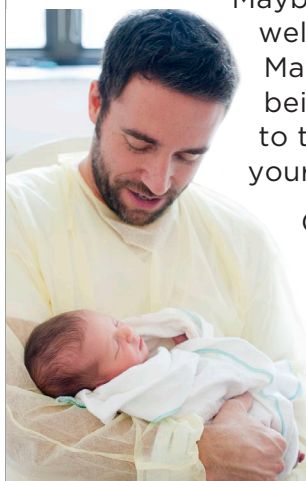
- > Gradually eat more fibre-rich foods (whole grain cereal products, legumes, fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds).
- > Choose fresh and complete foods rather than ultra-processed foods.
- > Eat prunes or drink prune juice.
- > Drink at least 2 litres of water per day.
- > Go to the toilet as soon as 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 different 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?

Childbirth often involves intense emotions. 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.



Maybe your delivery didn't go as well as you would have liked. Maybe you have fears about being a parent. Don't hesitate to talk about your concerns with your partner or family and friends.

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.

Who can I contact for help or to ask questions?

If you have any worries or concerns, don't hesitate to talk with a health professional.

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, ext. 36396**

Outside of these hours, call the Postpartum Unit:

> **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**.

If your baby needs emergency care, call **9-1-1**. The CHUM does not offer health care services for babies (pediatrics).



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
> **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



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