

my body

easing discomforts after birth

Belly	What is normal	Most people still look pregnant for a while after having a baby. Right after the baby is born, your belly will probably look about the same as it did when you were 20 weeks pregnant. Your belly will slowly change shape as your uterus shrinks down to the size it was before pregnancy. You may have some cramping in the first few days after giving birth, caused by your uterus getting smaller.
	What helps	For cramping <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ibuprofen ● Tylenol ● Warm bath ● Heating pad ● Stay hydrated
	When to reach out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Severe belly pain ● Belly very tender to the touch ● Fever greater than 100.4 F

Body image	What is normal	How we feel about our bodies can be complicated. It can feel even more complicated after giving birth, because all bodies change in some way after pregnancy. You may notice small changes or big changes, and that is normal. Remember that all bodies are beautiful and come in all shapes and sizes.
	What helps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Treating your body with love, kindness and patience ● Getting support from family, friends, and other people who have had a baby ● Therapy and support groups
	When to reach out	If you are struggling to cope with changes in your body after pregnancy, you are definitely not alone! Let your midwife team know so we can help.

Incision (C-Section)	What is normal	If you had a surgical (Cesarean) birth, you will have a long incision (cut) across the bottom of your belly. Over time, this will become a scar. You will probably feel sore for several weeks after giving birth. It is common to have numbness or a “pins and needles” feeling at your incision for several months after giving birth. Follow your midwife or doctor’s instructions for caring for your incision.
	What helps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Taking pain medications as needed for soreness (follow the instructions of your midwife or doctor) ● Getting as much rest and support as you can - it takes time to heal from major surgery!
	When to reach out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Severe belly pain ● Problems with your incision: part of the incision opening, green/yellow fluid around the incision, redness or heat around the incision ● Fever equal to or higher than 100.4 F

Bleeding	What is normal	It is common to have vaginal bleeding like a heavy period in the first week after having a baby. You may also pass some blood clots. Your bleeding will get lighter and change color over time. Most people stop having bleeding by around six weeks postpartum.
	What helps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Staying hydrated ● Slowly increasing your activity level after giving birth - it takes time to heal! ● Wearing disposable underwear such as Depends, or stretchy mesh underwear with a pad, may be most comfortable for a while
	When to reach out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Vaginal bleeding that soaks a thick maxi pad in an hour ● Passing clots as big as a small lemon ● Passing what looks like tissue ● Bleeding that is getting heavier instead of less each day ● Strong, foul smell to vaginal bleeding ● Fever equal to or higher than 100.4 F

Chest/ breast	What is normal	<p>Most people make a small amount of thick colostrum (early milk) in their first day or 2 postpartum. It doesn't look like a lot, but colostrum is liquid gold - it is completely packed full of healthy stuff for a newborn! After those first days of colostrum, your chest/breasts may feel very heavy and tender as your milk comes in - this is called engorgement. If you are nursing, your nipples may feel sore as they adjust. If you have had chest/breast surgery in the past, you may have pain or swelling in areas where milk has trouble moving through to the nipple.</p>
	What helps	<p>If you plan to nurse, or pump and bottle-feed with your milk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Feeding your baby on demand and at least 10-12 times per day or as recommended by your midwife or pediatrician ● Making sure baby has a deep latch and/or that you are using the right size pump parts for your body ● Putting moist warm washcloths on your chests/breasts before feeding or pumping, and then moist cold washcloths after ● Rubbing a little bit of your own chest/breast milk on the nipple and letting it dry, putting lanolin cream on the nipple, or using cool nipple gel pads ● Wearing a supportive sports bra or nursing bra <p>If you do not plan to nurse or pump, and want to dry up your milk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wearing a tight sports bra (not a binder) ● Using ice packs for comfort ● Taking Ibuprofen to help with swelling ● Try not to touch your nipples or "check" for milk by squeezing your nipple - any touch to the nipple tells your body to make more milk! ● Your midwife may be able to prescribe a medication that can make your milk dry up faster. This must be taken in the first day or two postpartum.
	When to reach out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Severe nipple pain or bleeding ● Nipple pain that doesn't go away a few minutes after baby latches ● Red, hot lump in your chest/breast ● Feeling like you are coming down with a flu (chills, body aches, etc.) ● Fever greater than 100.4 F ● You feel like you don't have enough milk for your baby.

Vulva and perineum	What is normal	Some people get tears during birth and have sutures in their vagina, on their vulva (the outside of the genitals including the labia/lips), or their perineum (the area between the vagina and the anus). You may feel soreness, tenderness, or stinging in these areas where you tore. Even if you had no tearing, it is normal to feel sore after giving birth.
	What helps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Using ice packs (in the first 24 hours after giving birth) ● Taking warm baths with water deep enough to reach your hips. You can add witch hazel or Epsom salts to the water ● Using over the counter numbing sprays and creams ● Fill your peri bottle with clean warm water before you pee. Spray the water towards your urethra while you pee to prevent stinging and then over your vulva after you are done.
	When to reach out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Severe pain in your vulva or perineum ● Problems with your sutures: sutures coming open, foul-smelling fluid around the sutures, green/yellow fluid around the sutures, redness or heat around the sutures ● Fever greater than 100.4 F

See the “Taking care of your perineum” handout for more detailed information.

Peeing	What is normal	You should be able to pee normally after having a baby, but may feel some stinging if you have sutures. For a few months after giving birth you may leak small amounts of pee when you laugh, cough, or sneeze - this may start during pregnancy, or you may not notice it until after the baby is born.
	What helps	<p>For stinging Fill your peri bottle with clean warm water before you pee. Spray the water towards your urethra while you pee to prevent stinging and then over your vulva after you are done.</p> <p>For leaking Kegel exercises help you strengthen the muscles of your pelvis, and this will help prevent leaking - starting them right after your baby is born is really helpful</p>
	When to reach out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Leaking large amounts of pee ● Unable to do normal activities due to leaking ● Unable to pee ● Burning pain when you pee ● Very dark pee ● Flank pain (pain just below your rib cage and above your waist, on either side of your back) ● Fever greater than 100.4 F

Pooping	What is normal	It is common to have constipation and/or gas pain after having a baby. Many people also get hemorrhoids during pregnancy, and it takes time for these to get better. Even without constipation or hemorrhoids, you may feel sore or bruised inside your butt (the baby's head puts a LOT of pressure there during labor).
	What helps	<p>For constipation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increasing fluids ● Increasing the fiber in your diet by eating a lot of fruit, vegetables, and whole grains ● Medications and supplements that might help: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Methylcellulose fiber (Citrucel®) ○ Psyllium (Fiberall®, Metamucil®) ○ Polycarbophil (FiberCon®) ○ Polyethylene glycol (MiraLAX®) <p>For hemorrhoids</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Avoiding constipation and straining ● Taking warm baths with water deep enough to reach your hips. You can add witch hazel to the water. ● Medications that might help: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Phenylephrine/mineral oil/petrolatum (Preparation H®) ○ Witch hazel (Tucks® pads or ointment) can soothe, but may sting or burn those with sutures
	When to reach out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Severe constipation (no bowel movement for 3 days or more) ● Heavy bleeding or severe pain from hemorrhoids

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Mood	What is normal	In the first few weeks after having a baby, it is common to have ups and downs with your mood. You are going through a lot of changes in your hormones, your family, and your life - it is normal to feel tired and overwhelmed. This is often called the “baby blues” and it usually gets better in a couple of weeks.
	What helps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doing basic self care like brushing your teeth and taking a shower every day • Deep breathing • Meditation, getting fresh air, or anything else that relaxes and calms you • Getting as much sleep as you can • Treating yourself with patience and love • Therapy • Medication, if you are having depression or anxiety • Reaching out to friends and family for help with chores and baby care. Talking with them about how you feel.
	When to reach out	<p>While the “baby blues” is considered normal, it should be mild and go away quickly. If you are feeling very sad or very anxious, or if it is lasting for more than a couple of weeks, you could be having postpartum depression or postpartum anxiety. Rarely, people can have postpartum psychosis where they see or hear things that aren’t real. These are all treatable, and we are here to help! Please contact your midwife team if you have concerns or just feel like more support would be good.</p> <p>If you have any of the following symptoms, please call your midwife, call 911, or go directly to your nearest emergency room:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thoughts of harming yourself, your baby, or anyone else • Thoughts of killing yourself, your baby, or anyone else • Thoughts that scare you or that you find very upsetting • Seeing or hearing things that other people can’t see or hear • Feeling very worried about your mental health (or hearing from people you care about that they are very worried for you)

See the “Mental health after birth” handout for more detailed information.

