

Your First Six Weeks After Birth

This packet explains what is normal in the first six weeks after a vaginal or cesarean birth, and what helps. Recovery is individual; your plan reflects your birth, healing, and goals.

For warning signs, see our When To Seek Help guide at mulberryobgyn.com/resources/when-to-seek-help.

Bleeding (lochia)

Lochia is the blood and tissue that lined your uterus during pregnancy. It is normal after both vaginal and cesarean births.

- It can last up to 6 weeks
- It starts bright red, then turns pink or brown, then yellow or white
- It slows the most in the first week
- A short rise in red bleeding around 7 to 14 days after birth can be normal
- You may pass small clots when you first get up

Use pads. Don't use tampons or menstrual cups until your physician says it's OK.

Cramps (afterpains)

Your uterus tightens as it shrinks back to its normal size. This can feel like period cramps.

- Cramps are often stronger while you breastfeed
- They can also be stronger if you've given birth before
- A heating pad on your belly can help

Soreness after a vaginal birth

The perineum (the area between your vagina and anus) is often sore and swollen for a few weeks, or longer after a tear or episiotomy (a small cut made during birth). These can help:

- An ice pack for 10 to 20 minutes at a time
- Ice helps most in the first 1 to 3 days
- A sitz bath (sitting in a few inches of warm water)
- Rinsing with warm water from a squeeze bottle after using the toilet, then patting dry
- Witch hazel pads, or a cushion to sit on

Most stitches dissolve on their own.

Cesarean Recovery and Pain Relief

Every recovery follows its own pace. Give yourself time to heal.

Cesarean recovery

A cesarean is major surgery. Your incision (the cut from surgery) may stay tender for 3 weeks or more, and it may feel numb. Most people get back to their usual activities in 4 to 8 weeks.

- Shower as usual
- Let soapy water run over the incision, then pat it dry
- Don't soak in a tub or swim until your physician says it's OK
- Don't lift anything heavier than your baby for the first 6 to 8 weeks
- Don't drive for at least 2 weeks, or while taking opioid pain medicine
- Take short walks to help prevent blood clots

Pain relief

Ibuprofen (Motrin) and acetaminophen (Tylenol) are sold without a prescription. Both are considered safe while breastfeeding.

Take ibuprofen in turns with acetaminophen, unless your physician has told you to avoid one of these medicines. Take one, then take the other 3 hours later. That way, you take a dose every 3 hours, and each medicine about every 6 hours. For example:

- 8 am: ibuprofen. 11 am: acetaminophen. 2 pm: ibuprofen. 5 pm: acetaminophen. Keep taking them in turns.

Follow the doses on your discharge instructions. Never take more than the daily maximum on each label. Ask your physician before taking any other pain medicine.



MULBERRY OBGYN

Your Visits and Contact

Your postpartum visits

- After a vaginal birth: a postpartum visit at 6 weeks
- After a cesarean birth: a check of your incision at 1 week, and a postpartum visit at 6 weeks

At your visits, we talk about healing, mood, sleep, feeding, and birth control. Bring your questions.

Contact Us

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Learn more

ACOG — Optimizing Postpartum Care (Committee Opinion 736)
<https://www.acog.org/clinical/clinical-guidance/committee-opinion/articles/2018/05/optimizing-postpartum-care>

ACOG — Cesarean Birth
<https://www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/cesarean-birth>

ACOG — Postpartum Pain Management
<https://www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/postpartum-pain-management>

MedlinePlus (NIH) — Vaginal delivery: discharge
<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000628.htm>

MedlinePlus (NIH) — Going home after a C-section
<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000624.htm>

HHS Office on Women's Health — Recovering from birth
<https://womenshealth.gov/pregnancy/childbirth-and-beyond/recovering-birth>