

After the Loss of a Baby: After-Hospital Care

Please know that we are deeply sorry for your loss. We hope to support you in any way we can at this difficult time. This guide will help you care for yourself when you go home.

If you have questions, ask your physician, advanced practice provider, nurse midwife or nurse.

Activity

Slowly increase your activity. Rest if you get tired. Let yourself get a good night's sleep. Let your partner and family members help with daily tasks.

- For the first 4 to 6 weeks, do not lift anything heavier than 10 pounds.
- Do not drive if you are taking narcotic pain medication.
- Your vaginal discharge will become lighter in color and decrease over the next 4 to 6 weeks.
- Bleeding is heavy at first and will slowly decrease over time. It is common to see a small increase in bleeding when you become more active. However, call a member of your care team if you soak more than 1 pad per hour for 2 hours or have ongoing multiple clots.
- Your body may need about 6 weeks to recover before having sexual intercourse. Talk to your physician about contraception if you want to avoid pregnancy.

Pain and cramping

Cramping can be very strong at times, especially during the first 48 to 72 hours. Drinking plenty of fluids and emptying your bladder often may help. Take pain medication as ordered by your physician. If the cramping becomes worse, along with abdominal pain that is not helped by pain medication, call a member of your care team.

Diet

You may go back to your normal diet. A diet that includes fruits, vegetables and plenty of fluids will help prevent constipation. If you are constipated for more than 3 to 4 days, contact a member of your care team.

Breast care

As early as 17 weeks of pregnancy, breast milk may start to fill your breasts.

To prevent or ease any discomfort:

- Wear a supportive bra or sports bra at all times, except when bathing.
- Use ice packs on your breasts to control swelling (as needed).
- Take pain medication as prescribed.
- Do not express milk or pump your breasts to empty the milk because this will cause your breasts to fill again.

Some women may choose to pump and donate their breast milk to a milk bank. If you would like more information about this, please ask your nurse or perinatal loss program coordinator.

Incision care and hygiene

Vaginal delivery

If you had a vaginal delivery with an episiotomy or a laceration, the stitches will dissolve on their own over the next few weeks. To keep the area clean and prevent infection:

- Shower as usual.
- Rinse yourself with the peri (squirt) bottle after using the toilet. Gently pat the area dry.
- Do not put anything (including douche or tampons) into your vagina for 6 weeks.
- Do not have sexual intercourse for 6 weeks.
- Do not put bubbles, fragrance or oils in your bath for 6 weeks.
- Do not go in swimming pools or hot tubs for 6 weeks.

Cesarean delivery

If you had a cesarean delivery (C-section), it is important to keep the surgical area clean to prevent infection. Follow these guidelines:

- Do not take tub baths for 2 weeks.
- When showering, let the water gently flow over your abdominal incision. Pat the area dry.
- Avoid lotions, creams or powders near the incision.
- You may wish to place a clean, dry pad over the incision between the skin folds. Change as needed to keep the area clean and dry.
- Check the incision each day for redness, drainage or separation.
- You will have staples, paper tape strips (Steri-Strips™) or a clear bandage over your incision. If you have staples or a clear bandage, a member of your care team will remove them at your office visit. If you have Steri-Strips, they will fall off within 2 weeks. Do not take them off before then. After that, you may peel off any Steri-Strips that are still on your skin.

- To ease any discomfort when you cough or sneeze, brace the incision with your hands or a pillow (hugging it to your incision). You may use an abdominal binder for comfort as directed by a member of your care team.

Hemorrhoids

Hemorrhoids are enlarged blood vessels near your rectum. They are common after pregnancy and should decrease in size and go away. For comfort, use cold compresses, a stool softener or medicated pads as directed by a member of your care team.

Swelling and perspiration

As your body adjusts to no longer being pregnant and your hormone levels return to normal, you may notice fluid changes in your body. Sweating a lot or waking up in a sweat is normal. If you have swelling in your legs, feet or hands, it usually gets worse before it gets better. It can take 2 to 3 weeks to go away. You may lose 10 to 15 pounds of weight in the first 3 weeks. Rest often and raise your legs to help decrease discomfort. If the swelling does not decrease and you have a headache that does not go away after you take pain medication, call a member of your care team.

Postpartum mood changes

It is normal to feel “down,” sad, tearful, moody, irritable, anxious or nervous after the loss of a baby. Many of these feelings may also be due to your body’s hormone changes.

Get help right away if your mood changes get worse or include:

- Feelings of hopelessness
- Guilt, panic or anxiety
- Difficulty concentrating or poor memory
- Major sleep or appetite changes

If you, or someone you know, has these signs, contact a physician or advanced practice provider right away.

If your symptoms get worse and you feel that you are at risk of harming yourself or others, go to the nearest emergency department or call 911 right away.

Always remember, you are not alone. Help is available. Postpartum anxiety and postpartum depression can be treated. There are trained staff who are just a phone call away. Treatment options may include counseling, medication or both.

NorthShore University HealthSystem’s Perinatal Depression Hotline may be accessed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, by calling 1.866.364.6667 (1.866.364.MOMS).

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline can also be accessed 24 hours a day by calling 988 (TTY: 711).

Medications

Do not take medications unless prescribed by or discussed with a member of your care team. Do not take more than 4,000 milligrams (mg) of acetaminophen (Tylenol®) in 24 hours. This includes other medications you may be taking that contain acetaminophen such as Norco® or Vicodin®.

When to call your care team

Please call a member of your care team if you have any of these symptoms:

- Pain or cramping not helped by prescribed medication
- Vaginal drainage that has a foul odor
- Heavy bleeding (soaks a full sanitary pad in 1 hour or less)
- Passing a clot from your vagina that is larger than the size of a golf ball
- Feeling dizzy, lightheaded or very tired
- Pain, swelling or redness in either leg
- Difficult or painful urination
- A temperature more than 100.4 degrees F
- Breast tenderness or redness
- Increased pain, swelling or separation of the stitches in your vagina (if you had a vaginal delivery/episiotomy)
- No bowel movement for 3 to 4 days
- Redness, tenderness, drainage or opening of your abdominal incision (if you had a C-section)
- Swelling that does not decrease and a headache that does not go away after you take pain medication
- Right upper abdomen pain
- Ringing in your ears
- Flu-like symptoms

Follow-up care

Schedule a follow-up visit with your physician or nurse midwife.

For other questions or concerns

Please tell your nurse if you have any questions or concerns about arrangements for your baby, certificates, mementos or other resources.

If you have other questions about your care, contact a member of your care team.