

What to Know After Having Your Baby (if you had a vaginal birth)



We are excited that you've had your baby and will be going home soon. In case you have problems when you go home, here is some information on when and where to call:

Emergency Warning Signs

If you have any of these symptoms, **please call your clinic or call OB Triage 272-2460.**

- ⚠ Heavy bleeding from your vagina or large blood clots that are as big as a lemon
- ⚠ Vaginal discharge with a strong, bad smell
- ⚠ Very bad abdominal (stomach) pain
- ⚠ Your breasts are sore, red, or hot to touch
- ⚠ Fever more than 101°F
- ⚠ Very bad headache that does not go away after you take Tylenol or Ibuprofen
- ⚠ You can't sleep due to anxiety (worries) or depression
- ⚠ Pain or a warm lump on one side of your calf or leg (do not massage it)

What's in This Booklet

Congratulations on your new baby! Postpartum (after birth) is a wonderful and sometimes hard time for families. Get as much rest and help as you can.

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Visits To The Clinic

We want to support you while you get used to having a new baby.

Please schedule visits to the clinic at these times:

- 2 weeks after the birth of your baby
- 6 weeks after the birth of your baby

We will talk about:

- Your emotions
- Your body healing
- Parenting and support
- Concerns
- Birth control

In case of emergencies, you can go to OB Triage for 6 weeks after giving birth.



What To Do At Home

Rest

Labor is hard work! Give yourself time to recover. It may take 6 to 8 weeks after giving birth to get your energy back.

- ☑ Accept help from family and friends for childcare, shopping, cooking, and cleaning.
- ☑ Try to nap with your baby.
- If you do too much, the bleeding from your vagina can get heavier.



Food, Water, and Vitamins

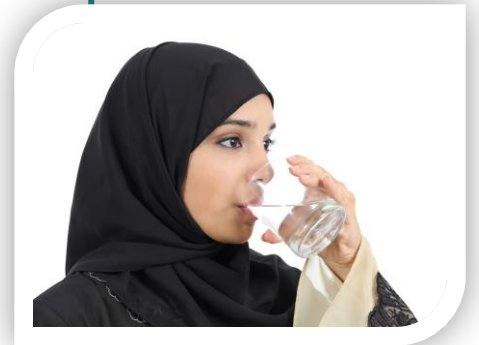
Eating regular healthy meals is good for you and your baby because:

- it gives you energy to care for your baby.
- it helps prevent infections and heal stitches.
- it is important for breastfeeding.

Drink lots of water!

- ☑ Drink at least 6 big glasses of water every day. This helps with constipation and with making enough breast milk.
- ☑ When you feed your baby, have a big glass of water with you to drink.

Keep taking your vitamins. It is especially good to keep taking iron if your provider recommended it.



More about the Vaginal and Perineal Muscles

Words to Know

- **Rectum:** Where poop leaves your body
- **Perineal muscles:** Muscles in the perineum, which is the area between your rectum and vagina.

What do the vaginal and perineal muscles do?

They help you to not wet your underwear when you sneeze or cough. They keep the uterus, bladder, and rectum from dropping into the vagina.

Why should I strengthen them?

They get weaker during pregnancy and birth.

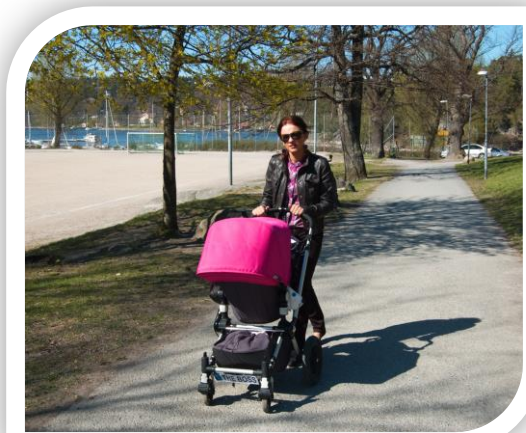
Exercise and Weight

Take the first two weeks after giving birth to rest and recover. Then start doing more physical activity and do some light exercise.

- Go outside and walk for 30 minutes a day.
- Babies can go outside even if it is very hot or cold. Fresh air and sunshine are good for both of you.
- ⚠ If you have more vaginal bleeding while you exercise, you need to slow down.
- It can take 6 to 12 months to lose the weight gained in pregnancy. Have patience and give yourself time.

Pelvic floor exercises are a good way to strengthen the muscles in and around your vagina and make your blood flow better.

- First, find the perineal muscle.
 - Try to stop and restart your pee while you're on the toilet. The muscle that you're using to do that is the perineal muscle. You found it!
 - Do not do this exercise often. It just helps you find the muscle.
- Once you know where the muscle is:
 - Squeeze the perineal muscle about 10 times, at least 6 times a day.
 - Hold each squeeze for 10 seconds
 - You will get better with practice



Hemorrhoids and Constipation

Hemorrhoids are swollen veins around your rectum.

- They can hurt or make you bleed when you poop.
- Many people get them during pregnancy or after pushing out a baby.

To care for hemorrhoids and help them shrink you can:

- ☑ use Tucks or Witch Hazel compresses. Keep them cool in the refrigerator.
- ☑ take a Sitz bath: soak your bottom in bath water 2-3 times a day for up to 15 minutes at a time.

Constipation is when you have trouble pooping or your poop is hard. It's important to prevent constipation, especially if you have hemorrhoids.

To prevent or ease constipation, you can:

- ☑ drink 8-10 glasses of water a day or other drinks without caffeine.
- ☑ eat foods high in fiber, like raisins, prunes, bran, cereals, muffins, beans, and raw fruits and vegetables.
- ☑ try a fiber supplement like Benefiber or Metamucil if you still don't have soft, regular poops.

Pain and Cramps

Many women have cramps for a few days after giving birth. This is because your body is helping your uterus (womb) shrink to its normal size. This helps prevent heavy bleeding.

- Right after giving birth, your uterus shrinks to the size of a grapefruit. You can feel the top of it just below your belly button.
- It takes 6 weeks for your uterus to return to the size it was before pregnancy.

Here are some things that help with cramps:

- Ibuprofen (take 400-600mg every 4-6 hours)
- Red raspberry leaf tea. Drink as much as you want.
- A warm bath or shower or a hot water bottle on your belly



Eat foods that are high in fiber to prevent or ease constipation.



Red raspberry leaf tea can help with cramps.

Caring for Your Vaginal Area and Stitches

Vaginal Pain

The area around your vagina is very tender and sensitive after delivery. Here are some things you can do to lessen pain:

- Use ice packs for the first 24 hours after giving birth. This can lessen pain and swelling.
- After 24 hours, do warm water soaks or sitz baths. It will also give you 15 minutes of private time! Here's how:
 - Put about 6 inches of warm water in your bathtub and sit in it. Do this 2 or 3 times a day.
 - This will help your vaginal area heal more quickly.

Burning When You Pee

You may have some burning the first time you pee after delivery. Here are some things that might help with the burning:

- Try peeing in the shower or bathtub.
- The hospital will give you a squirt bottle. Fill it with warm water and use it after you pee or poop. This helps keep your vaginal area clean and helps you feel more comfortable.
- Always wipe from front to back after using the toilet.

Stitches

Stitches usually dissolve in a few weeks and do not need to be taken out.

- If they are painful, take Tylenol (325-650mg) every 4-6 hours or take Ibuprofen (400-600mg) every 4-6 hours.

No Tampons or Douching

Do not use tampons for 6 weeks after your baby is born. You should never rinse out the inside of your vagina (douche), but especially stay away from douching during this time.



Don't use tampons for 6 weeks.



Vaginal Bleeding

After your baby is born you will have heavy bleeding like a period. This can last 6 to 8 weeks after giving birth.

- Each day the blood flow should become less. The color changes from bright red to brown and then cream color.
- The bleeding shouldn't smell bad.
- It is normal to pass small blood clots the size of raisins or grapes. **If the clots are large like lemons or oranges or if your bleeding soaks more than 2 pads an hour call OB Triage (272-2460) and talk to the nurse.**
- If the bleeding becomes very heavy, slow down! You may be doing too much.
- Peeing every 2 hours can help lessen vaginal bleeding.
- If you had birth control placed before you left the hospital (IUD or implant), your bleeding may last longer than 6 - 8 weeks.
- Your period may come back as early as a month after your baby is born. Or you may not get your period for another year (especially if you're breastfeeding). It's different for each person.

Sex

It is okay to have sex when you feel healed and the bleeding has stopped. Some people don't feel like having sex for a while after having a baby and would rather cuddle or talk. That's okay too. Talk to your partner about how you feel about sex.

Here are some other things to know.

- If you have sex with men, use birth control before you have sex. You can get pregnant very quickly after having a baby, even before your first period.
 - If you have not started a birth control method yet, use condoms.
- Your vagina might get dry if you are breastfeeding. This can make sex uncomfortable. Try a water-soluble lubricant like K-Y jelly to make sex feel better.
- You might leak milk with an orgasm. That is normal.
- If you have a partner or spouse, it is good to spend time alone with him or her. Even a 30 minute walk can be a date.



Talk to your partner about how you feel about sex.

Breast Pumps

You might be able to get electric breast pumps and some breastfeeding supplies through your health insurance. Call your insurance company or Medicaid for more information.



Feeding Your Baby

Breastfeeding

Congratulations for breastfeeding your baby! We are glad to help you continue breastfeeding.

For breastfeeding information and resources, see our other handouts.

Call our breastfeeding hotline if you have any questions or concerns about breastfeeding: 505-272-6455 (272-MILK).

If You Are Not Breastfeeding

Your milk may still “come in.”

- This happens 2-4 days after your baby’s birth.
- For 24 to 36 hours, your breasts will become very full and large.

This can be very uncomfortable. Here are some things that might help:

- Wear a supportive bra.
- Do not touch your breasts.
- Use ice packs or bags of frozen peas or corn. Put them over your breasts and under your armpits.
- Take Tylenol (325-650mg) every 4-6 hours or Ibuprofen (400-600mg) every 4-6 hours.

After this uncomfortable time, milk may keep leaking from your breasts. Leaking can happen for 2 weeks after delivery.

Ways to Take Care of Yourself

- Ask for help. Let other people cook, clean, and run the house. Focus on yourself and your baby.
- If you want people to visit, ask them to bring food for you and your family.
- Sleep whenever you can. You may want to get things done when the baby sleeps, but try to rest. This is your time to sleep too!
- Talk to other mothers or join a new parents group. If you’re breastfeeding, call La Leche League and go to their meetings.



Try to sleep while your baby is sleeping.

Emotions

Baby Blues

Bringing a new baby home is a big deal! Although it is often a happy time, there may be times when you feel emotional.

Many people get “baby blues”. They are a normal part of getting used to parenting.

- If you have baby blues, you might feel sad during the first week after giving birth. You might:
 - have mood swings.
 - get tearful.
 - feel grumpy or worried.
- These feelings get worse if you are tired or anxious (nervous, stressed).

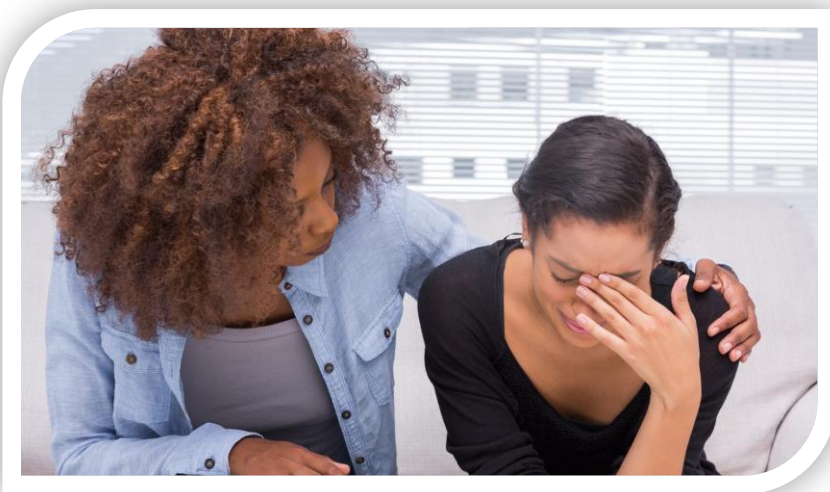
If you're feeling baby blues, it might help to:

- talk to family and friends (including other new moms).
- take time to care for yourself.
- get more rest.
- get help with childcare.

Talk to your healthcare provider if:

- you are not sleeping.
- you are getting more and more upset or sad.

About 3 out of every 4 women get baby blues.



If you're feeling sad, talk to family and friends.



About 1 out of every 10 women get postpartum depression.

Postpartum Depression—More Than Just The Blues

Some women have depression during the first year after having a baby—usually in the first 3 months. This is called postpartum depression.

Signs of depression:

- You feel overwhelmed or you feel like you can't take care of your baby.
- You feel anxious (very worried). You have feelings of panic (sudden fear) or panic attacks.
- You aren't interested anymore in the activities you used to enjoy.
- You feel like you don't want to eat or you're eating too much.
- You feel really lonely.
- You are crying a lot.
- You feel angry, like you might explode.
- Your energy is low or it is hard to get out of bed.
- You have a hard time sleeping or you can't sleep, even when the baby sleeps.
- You can't concentrate or focus. It is hard to make decisions.
- You feel like you are not normal or real anymore.
- You feel like a failure as a mother. You are thinking that the baby might be better off without you.
- You are afraid of touching the baby or you don't like the baby.
- You are thinking about killing yourself or dying. You fear that you will hurt yourself or your baby.

People with postpartum depression have these symptoms every day for 2 weeks or longer. If you're feeling this way, it can be a sign of depression.

Call your provider to set up an appointment as soon as possible. **Call your provider or OB Triage (272-2460) right away if you feel like you want to hurt yourself or your baby, or if you feel your depression is very bad.**

It's not just you! Depression can be treated with care measures, like counseling or medicine.

Postpartum Psychosis

A few women can have a serious emotional health problem called postpartum psychosis. They might:

- lose touch with reality.
- hear or see things that are not really there.
- have strange and sometimes dangerous behavior.

If this happens with you or your loved one, **get help right away**. This is an emergency. **Call Psychiatric Emergency Services at 272-2920 or 911.**

Who Gets Depressed After Having a Baby?

Anybody can get postpartum depression.

We do not know the exact cause, but it is probably related to a many things at once.

- One cause might be changes in hormones after giving birth. This changes how the brain functions.
- You are at more risk for postpartum depression if:
 - you've had depression or times of "feeling low" in the past.
 - you have family members with depression.
 - you have had stressful things happen in your life recently.
- Having a baby is a major event and it can trigger reactions to past traumas (stressful and frightening events) that you may have suffered.

Who to Call

You can get help to get past these feelings. Many people feel better when they talk to someone, like in support groups or counseling. Talk to your provider if you're worried. Or you can call one of these phone numbers.

- If you feel like you may hurt yourself or your baby call UNM Psychiatric Emergency Services at **272-2920 or 911.**
- Postpartum Support Warm Line: 800-944-4773
- New Mexico Crisis and Access Line (open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week): (855) 662-7474
- Journeys Clinic at UNM Hospital 4th Floor Women's Health Center (appointments on Thursday mornings): 505-272-2245

If you have postpartum depression, remember to take care of yourself!

See page 10 for tips on self-care.



Important Phone Numbers

Please call your clinic if you are really worried about anything.

- **272-2460: Emergencies** - OB Triage (If you need to be seen right away, you can go to OB Triage during the 6 weeks after you have your baby.)
- **272-2245:** University Center for Women's Health (at UNMH)
- **925-CARE (925-2273):** UNMH Women's Primary Care (on Eubank)
- **272-2900:** Westside Family Health
- **861-1013:** Belen First Choice Clinic
- **865-4618:** Los Lunas First Choice Clinic
- **248-7703:** Albuquerque Indian Health

