

# postpartum mom

a resource guide to  
the first six weeks



every parent

congratulations  
on the birth of  
*your baby!*



It's an exciting and joyful but sometimes overwhelming, confusing or challenging time. While it's common to spend a lot of time researching the changes our bodies go through during pregnancy and birth, we often don't know a lot about postpartum changes and care after you give birth. Knowing more about these changes, why they are happening and how to care for yourself will give you some empowerment and peace of mind.



## **READ ON FOR...**

an overview of some of the physical, mental and emotional changes you may experience in the first six weeks after delivery, and be sure to check in with your health care provider with concerns or questions.\* ♥

\*THIS CONTENT IS FOR INFORMATION PURPOSES ONLY AND SHOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED A SUBSTITUTE FOR MEDICAL ADVICE.



about every parent.♥



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*Katisha*

**Katisha Rasheed**  
FOUNDER OF EVERY PARENT

# breast changes: the first two weeks

Your breasts changed throughout your pregnancy, and they are going to continue to change now!

After you give birth, your breasts will make colostrum, a golden concentrated milk that's rich in nutrients, antibodies and antioxidants for your baby. Your baby only needs about a teaspoon of colostrum at each feeding (but that's 8-10 times per day) for the first few days.




## Not breastfeeding or pumping?

A well-fitting bra and applying a cold pack to your breasts for 15 minutes every hour as needed will help with engorgement as your milk supply dries up over the next two weeks.

Studies show that skin to skin contact (no shirt for you and just a diaper for baby) is ideal for helping both you adjust to breastfeeding in the early weeks.







Around day 3 or 4, your breasts start to make *transitional milk*, which is thinner and whiter than colostrum, but still creamy.

Your breasts will feel warmer and fuller. If they're uncomfortably full of milk—hard, warm and painful—it's called engorgement. Nursing frequently, hand-expressing or pumping milk, a warm shower, and massaging your breasts before and during feedings can all help. As you and your baby get into the rhythm of breastfeeding during the first two weeks after birth, engorgement should subside. ♥





# breast changes: weeks 2-6 & beyond

Ten to 15 days after birth, your breasts move into the third phase of milk production: mature milk. Mature milk is thinner than transitional milk, and bluish-white when your baby first starts to feed. Later on in the nursing session, the milk is creamier. Your breasts will be softer and smaller than they were when you were producing transitional milk, but still be bigger than before you were pregnant.



Breastfeeding  
makes you  
*hungry and  
thirsty!*

Make sure to have easy access to meals, snacks and water and other fluids.

It's normal to feel a briefly uncomfortable "pins and needles" sensation as baby latches on your breast and your milk lets down. That feeling should be short, so if breastfeeding is painful, check in with a lactation consultant.



*Newborn babies nurse  
8 to 12 times per day*

(that is, over 24 hours) for the first month, and 7-9 times a day during months 1 and 2, taking in an ounce or two of milk each time for the first month and two to four ounces in the next couple months. ♥



# taking care of *your nipples*

If you're breastfeeding or pumping, your nipples get a workout! They may be sore, irritated or cracked. Here's how to care for them:

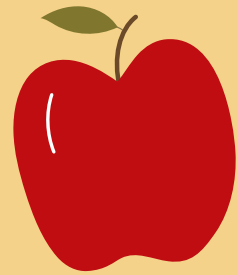
- 1 Skip the soap in the shower or bath.
- 2 If you're leaking milk in your bra, change breast pads frequently. Or, hang out topless so your nipple skin gets air and light.
- 3 Gently apply a couple drops of breast milk or a small amount of lanolin (a natural waxy substance produced by wool, available at drug stores) to dry, sore nipples.
- 4 Check that baby is latching well—baby's mouth should cover your nipple and areola (the coloured part around the nipple), with her chin and nose touching your breast.
- 5 Bright pink, itchy, burning or crusty nipples could be a sign of thrush, a common yeast infection. Check with your health care provider.
- 6 A tiny yellow or white spot on your nipple could be a milk bleb or blister, which happens with the nipple pore gets blocked. Your baby's nursing may naturally resolve the blockage, or you can apply a warm, wet washcloth to the spot for 10 minutes. ♥

# Uterus and cervix changes.♥



Right after giving birth, your uterus is round, hard and weighs about 2.5 lbs, so your belly will still be rounded. Soon, the uterus begins to contract and shrink, causing a crampy feeling that's often called "after pains" that lasts for a couple weeks after birth. You may especially notice these after pains during breastfeeding. It's ok to take an over-the-counter NSAID like naproxen or ibuprofen if the pain is bothersome.

**After 4-6 weeks,**  
your uterus is back to its  
regular size, about 2 ounces,



*the size of a large apple.*

As for your cervix, immediately after birth it's about the width of two fingers, and gradually narrows and thickens over the next few weeks, to close to what it was before delivery. ♥

postpartum •

# vaginal

## bleeding

Postpartum vaginal bleeding is another part of new motherhood. Also called “lochia,” this is a mix of blood, clots and mucus exiting the uterus.

In the first three to 10 days, expect dark red blood that’s often heavier than your regular period. It’s important to use pads, not tampons to prevent bacteria from getting into your still-healing body. (Contact your doctor if you have very large clots the size of a lemon, or heavy bleeding that soaks a pad every hour.)

After that, the bleeding tapers off into lighter spotting for up to six weeks after delivery, so you can switch to pantyliners.♥

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

Much of the postpartum blood comes from the site where your placenta detached from the uterine wall after delivery, leaving a wound behind. So take it easy as you’re recovering, to give your body the chance to heal.





# Baby blues

vs.

# postpartum depression & anxiety

Not surprisingly, all the physical changes going on can affect your mental state.

The “baby blues” often last 5–12 days after delivery, and include irritability, tears, trouble sleeping, anxiety and mood swings. You may feel overwhelmed or have trouble concentrating.



Postpartum depression symptoms are more significant, intense and longer-lasting. Severe mood swings, change in appetite, difficulty bonding with baby, insomnia, intense irritability or anger, anxiety or panic attacks, or feeling restless or hopeless are some of the troubling signs.

There are also the “baby pinks”, which could simply be a post-birth feeling of elation, or it can intensify into high energy, being more talkative than normal and not needing to sleep. ♥



If you're struggling, there are a number of resources for help.

- Contact your health care provider or local health unit
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- [postpartumprogress.com](http://postpartumprogress.com)
- [postpartum.net](http://postpartum.net)





# baby brain

[bey-bee breyen]n.

## 1. feeling forgetful or foggy.

Many women don't experience postpartum depression or anxiety, but the postpartum period is still challenging, thanks to lack of sleep and how significantly your life has changed. It's pretty common to deal with "mom brain/baby brain/momnesia" – feeling forgetful or foggy. And your brain really does physically change after giving birth, as you sharpen particular skills needed for caregiving. How to cope? Know this is natural, make lists and try to get a little more sleep (yes, this is hard!). ♥





# hair loss

Before you were pregnant, your hair growth moved through phases: growth, rest, shed, repeat. During pregnancy, you stayed in the growth phase longer than usual (thank you, hormones), which adds up to that gorgeous pregnancy hair for many women. When your estrogen levels decrease sharply in the month after birth, you enter the shedding phase quickly, and that's when you may lose what feels like a ridiculous amount of hair. This loss peaks about four to five months after birth, and most moms return to their regular amount of hair by one year. If it bothers you, try a volumizing shampoo and a conditioner for fine hair. ♥





# skin 101

Skin changes can kick in during the postpartum period too. It's not surprising when you think about the major disruptions in hormones and sleep you're going through. You may notice acne, or dry or oily skin. Most of these resolve within six months when your body stabilizes some more, but in the meantime eating well, drinking a little extra water and using gentle cleansers (note that benzol peroxide is safe for breastfeeding moms) should help.

Your increased blood supply during pregnancy could mean you spot spider veins (narrow, swollen veins visible just under the surface of the skin), often on your



torso or thighs. Similarly, thanks to your changing body shape, reddish stretch marks (actually a form of scar tissue) are common on the belly, thighs, hips or breasts. Both will fade in time but may not disappear completely. An indulgent skin oil, lotion or balm is always a good idea, and may help fade stretch marks.



Some moms have swollen feet and hands, with stretched, shiny skin, for up to a week after delivery. This happens because of higher levels of the hormone progesterone, and subsides on its own. In the meantime, compression socks, gentle walks and keeping your feet elevated can help. (Call your doctor if you have swelling accompanied by shortness of breath or chest pain though as that's a sign of an urgent problem.) ♥



# nutrients

## *you may need*

### iron

Pregnancy and delivery can deplete your iron levels, leading to feeling symptoms like weakness, dizziness, fatigue and trouble concentrating. If a blood test confirms low iron levels, your doctor may recommend an iron supplement or iron-rich foods like beef or dark leafy greens, taken with vitamin C-rich foods like citrus or tomato.

### calcium

If you're breastfeeding, 1,000 mg of calcium per day is recommended. Dairy products, leafy greens, tofu, almonds and salmon with bones are all good food sources, or you can take a supplement.

### vitamin d

Some studies have linked low vitamin D levels to a higher risk of postpartum depression. You can get vitamin D through sunlight on exposed skin, from fortified products like milk, and or via a supplement.

### folic acid

It's recommended that women of childbearing age take a supplement of 400 mcg of folic acid daily. If you're breastfeeding, you need slightly more: 500 mcg. Foods that naturally contain folate (the food form of folic acid) include spinach, fortified breakfast cereal, beef liver and asparagus. ♥

# your digestion

Constipation is common after both vaginal and C-section deliveries, thanks to medications, dehydration, hormonal changes and resting in bed or on the couch with your babe. And, being backed up can lead to uncomfortable gas and bloating.

**1**

Enjoy some fibre-forward foods like apples or dried apricots

**2**

Keep drinking water, especially if you're breastfeeding

**3**

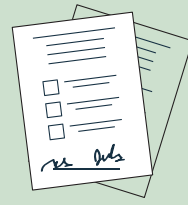
Your doctor may recommend a stool softener or anti-gas medication

**4**

Try some gentle stretches (for example, the yoga cat pose on all fours, curving your back up), even if you're still in bed







# hormones

## cheat sheet

There is a complex mix of hormones in your body before, during and after pregnancy. Here are some of the main ones that can affect your mood and outlook postpartum—it can be comforting to just say to yourself, “It’s ok to feel this way and my hormones will settle down soon.”

### estrogen

Estrogen levels decrease markedly after delivery. You may have night sweats, hot flashes, low sex drive and vaginal dryness.

### progesterone

At its highest during pregnancy, progesterone plummets after giving birth. These changing levels may contribute to “baby blues” in the first six weeks after delivery.

### oxytocin

Also known as “the love hormone,” oxytocin floods your system right after delivery and helps to form that initial bond with your babe.

### prolactin

This hormone kicks in right after giving birth, and helps make breast milk. If you’re breastfeeding, prolactin levels may decrease your interest in sex, but also make you feel relaxed and nurturing. ❤️



Your muscles and ligaments have been under strain during pregnancy and delivery, so it's not surprising that your core strength (that is, your back, belly and pelvis) is reduced. In the first weeks after birth, avoid lifting anything heavier than your baby. Be slow and steady when you begin exercising again. You can start Kegels (pelvic floor exercises) right away though.

## HELPFUL TIP

Labour and pushing may have strained areas you hadn't really thought about, like your tailbone. Gentle stretching, icing and a doughnut-shaped cushion can help you sit more comfortably.

Many new moms have diastasis recti, where the abdominal muscles separate from being stretched during pregnancy, giving you a poochy belly just above or below your belly button. This often returns to normal after 8 weeks, but if it doesn't, a physiotherapist can identify exercises to help bring the muscles together again. ♡



# joints & bones

While you're pregnant, a hormone called relaxin makes your ligaments and joints looser in preparation for birth, and that looseness continues during the postpartum period too for up to three months. So, it's a good idea to stick to lower-impact exercise, like walking or yoga, for the first 12 weeks after birth.



Your shoe size may also go up about a half size, and for some women that's a permanent change.

Most of the time, hips that got wider during pregnancy go back to usual around 12 weeks postpartum. ♥



The pelvic floor is an important group of muscles that attach from your pubic bone at the front of your pelvis to the base of your spine at the back of your pelvis, and from side to side. This forms kind of hammock that supports the pelvic organs—the bladder, uterus and rectum—so they can function properly.

## DID YOU KNOW

During pregnancy and delivery, hormones and pressure on the pelvic floor muscles can cause them to weaken or become too tight. What happens then? You may experience difficult symptoms like pee or poo leaks, urgent or frequent peeing, constipation or pelvic pain.

Those aren't symptoms you should just live with, so checking in with a physiotherapist that specializes in pelvic floor issues is a great idea. They can help you learn how to exercise, heal and strengthen your pelvic floor. ♥



# taking care of *your perineum*

The perineum is the area between your anus and vulva, and it's going to be sore, especially if you had a vaginal delivery and stitches. It's also important to keep the area clean, whether you had a vaginal or C-section delivery. To help clean and soothe your perineum:

**1**

Wet and freeze a maxi pad, then wrap it in thin cloth. Place it on your perineum for 20 minutes at a time during the first 24 hours. Use a fresh pad and cloth each time. There are also premade disposable pads or wipes with witch hazel to help soothe and heal.

**2**

Lie on your side or back, rather than sitting.

**3**

Take a warm bath (if your health care provider gives the go-ahead) or use a Sitz bath (a basin that fits over the toilet bowl) with warm water and Epsom salts

**4**

As you pee, spray your perineum with a "peri bottle": a squeeze bottle filled with clean warm water, to help prevent stinging. ♥

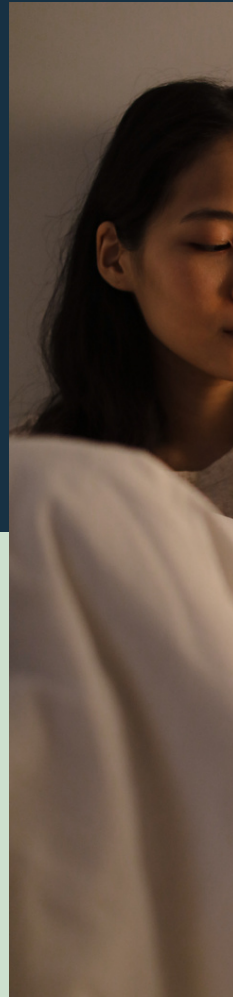
## HEMORRHOIDS

These tips also apply if you have hemorrhoids (enlarged blood vessels inside and outside the rectum), which should gradually subside.

According to the American Thyroid Association

# 5 to 10%

of women have  
postpartum thyroiditis  
an inflammation of the thyroid gland.



Symptoms that happen around 1-3 months after delivery include insomnia, anxiety, fatigue, irritability and a fast heart rate, while symptoms 4-8 months after delivery include fatigue, weight gain, depression, constipation and dry skin. Your doctor can order a blood test and any needed medication. ♥





check  
list

## preparing your home for *postpartum recovery*

- Pads and/or disposable underwear
- Sitz bath (available at drug stores)
- Peri bottle
- Water bottles you can use one-handed
- Comfy pillows for support during feeding
- Flexible cold packs (including those specifically designed for the perineum)
- Witch hazel pads (for hemorrhoid relief)
- A belly binder (to support your abdomen) if you have a C-section
- A basket of snacks, tissues, lotions, magazines and whatever else you like!



“

Every mark on me now, every shape that has changed since I had kids, that's evidence of the fact that

**I am a superhero.**♥

– Kristen Bell



questions?  
**get in touch**



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essential packages for **every parent.**