

# After-Pregnancy Care

PREGNANCY TIPS AND ARTICLES

ARTICLE

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Some women develop urinary tract infections (UTIs) and haemorrhoids after childbirth, and if not properly addressed, these conditions can lead to discomfort and be harmful to their wellbeing.

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## Uterus Care

The uterus is the remarkable organ that serves as your little one's home during pregnancy. After delivery, it will still weigh as much as 0.7 kg (1 1/2 lb). If you press the center of your abdomen, your uterus is usually just below the level of the umbilicus.

The process by which your body returns to its pre-pregnant state is known as involution, and shrinkage of the uterus to its original size is a naturally occurring part of this process. To assist in the process of shrinkage, your nurse or midwife may knead your uterus during the first hour after birth. Within a week of delivery, you probably won't be able to feel your uterus when you press your belly, and by the end of the sixth postpartum week, your uterus will have shrunk to about 60 grams (2 oz).

During this time, the uterus will also continue to shed the lining it used to support pregnancy. This results in a discharge (known as lochia) that is bloody for the first 3 or 4 days after delivery, then lightens to a brown or yellowish color over the next 10 to 12 days. This discharge is a perfectly natural occurrence and shouldn't cause you alarm.

You may, however, experience some discomfort due to the contractions that accompany uterine involution. If so, consult your physician before taking any medicine, including aspirin.

# Urinary Tract Care

After delivery, you may have some difficulty emptying your bladder and may feel a burning sensation when you urinate. This burning is due to vaginal sensitivity and will pass. Some women may have a harder time sensing when they need to urinate because the bladder has been slightly numbed from bruising during delivery. Fortunately, normal sensation returns very quickly.

Giving birth to a child affects the whole area surrounding the uterus. Whether or not you deliver vaginally, your urinary tract has been squeezed by your fetus for the last few months of your pregnancy. If you have delivered vaginally, your cervix has been completely dilated. This can make you more vulnerable to bacterial infection.

The following are steps you can take to help prevent urinary tract infections (UTIs):

- Empty your bladder as soon as you can after giving birth and about every 3 hours afterwards.
- Drink plenty of fluids, especially water.
- Wear cotton underwear and avoid tight pants and leggings.
- Keep the vaginal area clean; wipe from front to back after bowel movements.

If you do develop a UTI, you will recognize it by the following symptoms:

- Urgency
- Fever
- Chills
- Discomfort when urinating
- Inability to empty the bladder completely
- Abdominal or back pain
- Frequent urination in small amounts

Most people don't experience all of these symptoms. Check with your doctor right away if you have more than a few.

# Hemorrhoid Care

Hemorrhoids are a generally harmless, but upsetting, problem common to pregnant women and those who've just given birth. Hemorrhoids are swollen veins in and around the anus, and in this case are caused by expansion of the uterus, which puts more pressure on the entire area. Constipation aggravates them still further.

- Hemorrhoids can make bowel movements uncomfortable. Luckily, they usually don't last very long and can be treated easily. The following are techniques you can use to ease the discomfort:

- Sit in a shallow tub of warm water (called a sitz bath) for 10 minutes at a time several times a day. You may add a little baking soda to the water.
- Avoid rubbing or excessive cleaning of the area, which will only increase irritation.
- Use ice packs to reduce swelling (apply for 10 minutes, then remove for 10).
- Ask your doctor if he or she recommends local anesthetic creams or compresses or oral medication.
- Avoid sitting or standing for long periods; try to shift your position from time to time.
- Avoid straining and constipation
- Avoid hard stools

