After your baby is born
Caring for yourself and your baby

the women's
the royal women's hospital

This factsheet is to provide you and your family with information about caring for yourself and your baby in the first weeks after birth.

Leaving the hospital

Before you leave the hospital we will give you:

- any medicines that you need, or a prescription to pick them up from the pharmacy
- a medical certificate (if you or your support person need one)
- a letter for your local doctor (GP) and a summary of your care called an *After Visit Summary* (you can also see these in Health Hub)
- CentreLink and birth registration forms, including your Notice of Birth
- your baby's Health, Learning and Development book (also called their 'Green Book').

If you are going home in a car, Victorian law requires that you use an appropriate child restraint seat.

Please visit the VicRoads website for more details (http://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au).

Visits after birth

Midwife

We will offer you a midwife visit to check that you and your baby are well.

Before you leave the hospital, we will:

- confirm your address
- tell you the day the visit will happen and whether it will happen at your house or the hospital.

Maternal and Child Health Nurse

Your Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Nurse will visit you at home within 2 weeks of your baby coming home.

They will:

- check the health of you and your baby
- organise your next visits to your local Maternal and Child Health Centre.

Settling in at home

All new parents need support, especially if they're single or have no family close by.

Don't be afraid to ask for help. You can talk with your MCH Nurse or midwife about the services that are available to you.

Caring for a new baby is a shared responsibility. Accepting help from family, friends, and other support people with baby care and household tasks can give you time to rest, recover, and adjust to life with your new baby

Your MCH Nurse will arrange a new parents group for you to meet other new parents in your area and share ideas.

Looking after yourself at home

Managing pain

Take painkillers as directed by us. If you need to check what to take, you can check your *After Visit Summary*.

Mental health

Having a new baby can bring joy, but it can also be challenging and exhausting. It is normal to experience a range of emotions as you adjust to this major life change.

To help support your mental health, prioritise sleep, rest and mindful activities where possible. Getting outside for gentle exercise can also help your mood.

If you are struggling with your mental health or emotional wellbeing, reach out for support. Seeking help is a sign of strength, and looking after your wellbeing is an important part of caring for your baby.

You can speak to your GP or MCH Nurse or contact the PANDA Hotline (number below).

Exercise

- You can start pelvic floor exercises as soon as your baby is born. Please see our fact sheet for more information (link below).
- You can gradually increase your activity to 20 to 30 minutes of gentle walking each day.
- Try not to lift anything heavier than your baby.

Caring for your perineum or caesarean wound

It is important to wash your hands before and after changing your pad or touching your wound.

Perineal stiches

- Try to keep your stitches clean and dry.
- Change your pad every few hours.
- Wash your perineum daily and gently pat dry.
- Do not put any ointments or herbs on your perineum (unless recommended by your midwife or doctor).

Caesarean wound

- Keep the wound clean and dry.
- We will let you know if there are any stitches that need to be removed.
- Your dressing can be removed after 7 days. You can do this yourself or get help from your GP.

For more information, please see our factsheet on *Caesarean births* (link below).

Vaginal bleeding

It is normal to have some vaginal bleeding after having a baby. You might even pass some small clots, especially after a breast feed.

Change pads regularly, avoid using tampons.

Week 1

By the end of the first week, the bleeding will become less and lighter in colour (pinkish).

Week 2

In the second week, bleeding will be even less and be brownish in colour (like the end of a period).

Tell your midwife or doctor if:

- your bleeding suddenly gets much redder and heavier,
- if you are filling pads in 1 or 2 hours
- if you have a fever
- if the discharge smells, or has a green or grey colour.

Your bladder and bowels

Leaking of urine (wee) or stool (poo) – also known as incontinence - is common after having a baby but is not normal.

You should tell your midwife or GP if this is happening - they will be able to help you.

Bladder

If you feel like your bladder isn't emptying completely when you wee, tell your midwife or GP.

If you can't wee at all, it is important to seek medical help straight away - this is not normal and requires medical help.

Bowels

It is common to have constipation (being unable to poo) or hemorrhoids (swollen veins in your rectum or anus) after giving birth.

You can help prevent this happening by:

- drinking plenty of water
- eating foods with fibre
- doing regular, gentle exercise.

If you need more help, your pharmacist or your GP can recommend treatments to try.

When to seek help

If you notice any of these signs or symptoms, see your GP urgently or go to the nearest Emergency Department.

- Sudden increase in bleeding; heavy blood loss; blood loss that does not stop.
- Feeling faint, dizziness and heart beating too fast (palpitations).
- Fever, shivering, tummy pain or bad-smelling blood or discharge from your vagina.
- Headaches with visual disturbances and feeling sick (nausea) or being sick (vomiting) within 3 days of having your baby.
- Redness, swelling and pain on your calf (back of the lower leg).
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing.
- Being unable to wee at all.
- Redness on your breast.

If you have a sore throat, please see your GP as soon as possible.

Breastfeeding and breast care

We will show you how to feed your baby and care for your breasts. There will be many changes to your breasts in the early days – these will settle down over time.

If you need support with breastfeeding or want to learn more, please see:

- the Women's website (link below)
- the Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) website (link below)
- your MCH Nurse.

Abdominal muscle separation

Your abdominal (tummy) muscles can separate during pregnancy as your baby grows.

If they do not come back together after birth, this is called *abdominal muscle separation*.

After your baby is born, there are exercises that you can do to help bring your abdominal muscles back together. Please see our fact sheet for more information (link below).

Your midwife or GP can also refer you to a physiotherapist if the separation is large or if you have other concerns.

Sex and contraception

You can get pregnant very soon after your baby is born. This can happen even if you have not had your period yet.

It is important to:

- wait until you feel ready before returning to having sex.
- consider non-penetrative sex until all wounds have healed and vaginal bleeding has stopped.
- use contraception if you are not planning another baby.

Your midwife will talk about options for contraception before you leave the hospital. You can also ask your GP at your 6-week check-up.

Planning another baby

We recommend a space of 12 months between pregnancies, or 18 months if you have had a caesarean birth.

This gives you time to recover and decreases the chance that your next baby will be small or born early.

Common questions about newborns

Your baby's cord

Your baby's cord will drop off in 3 to 7 days. Until it does, clean the cord daily as part of your baby's daily bath and pat it dry.

Don't use any products on the cord. You should fold the top of your baby's nappy down so that it doesn't cover the cord. This helps to keep the cord dry.

Rashes

Nappy rash will make your baby's bottom red and sore.

You can help prevent nappy rash by:

- changing their nappy often
- washing and rinsing cloth nappies thoroughly
- leaving your baby's nappy off for some time each day
- only washing your baby's bottom with water (or perfume- and alcohol-free baby wipes).

If your baby does gets nappy rash, use a zinc and castor oil cream. If the rash doesn't get better, tell your MCH Nurse or your GP.

Rashes on the face and or body are also common in babies. These usually go away after a couple of weeks.

However, if your baby is unwell and has a rash, see your GP or talk to your MCH Nurse. If you're worried, take your baby to the nearest hospital.

How will you know if there is something wrong with your baby?

Your midwife will have given you a fact sheet called *For the first week of life – a parent's guide* (link below).

Please refer to this fact sheet for concerns about your baby. You will find useful phone numbers there where you can get more help.

Your 6-week health check-up

We recommend that you and your baby have a check-up with your GP 6 weeks after your baby is born.

This is an important appointment. Your GP will check your recovery after birth and assess your baby's progress.

They will then provide ongoing health care for both you and your baby.

Other things to think about

Vaccinations

We recommmend that all women and family members get a vaccine to protect them against influenza (flu)and whooping cough.

You can get these from your GP or local pharmacy.

Vitamin D supplements

We recommend a vitamin D supplement for you (if you are breastfeeding) and your baby (until they are 12 months old).

In an emergency

Virtual Emergency Department

For urgent care from home or anywhere else
24 hours a day, 7 days a week
Website: https://ved.vic.gov.au/

RWH Women's Emergency Care

For babies up to 14 days of age and people who have given birth in the last 6 weeks
Telephone: (03) 8345 2000
24 hours a day, 7 days a week

The Royal Children's Hospital Emergency Department

For urgent medical care to children and adolescents
24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Maternal & Child Health Line

Telephone: 13 22 29
24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Australian Breastfeeding Association

Telephone: 1800 686 268 (Breastfeeding Helpline)
24 hours a day, 7 days a week

24 hour Nurse-On-Call

Telephone: 1300 606 024
24 hours a day, 7 days a week

PANDA (Perinatal Anxiety & Depression Australia)

Telephone: 1300 726 306 (National Helpline)
Monday to Friday, 9am to 7:30pm; Saturday, 9am to 4pm

For more information

The Royal Women's website

Pelvic floor exercises – fact sheet
https://www.thewomens.org.au/health-information/fact-sheets#pelvic-floor-exercises
Breastfeeding - fact sheets
https://www.thewomens.org.au/health-information/fact-sheets#breastfeeding-all-fact-sheets-in-english
Abdominal muscle separation – fact sheet
https://www.thewomens.org.au/health-information/fact-sheets#abdominal-muscle-separation
For the first week of life – a parent's guide
https://www.thewomens.org.au/health-information/fact-sheets#parent-guide-for-the-first-week-of-life
Vitamin D supplements for babies – fact sheet
https://www.thewomens.org.au/health-information/fact-sheets#vitamin-d-supplements-for-babies

Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA)

https://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/

Raising Children Network

https://raisingchildren.net.au/newborns/safety/home-pets/dogs

Do you need an interpreter?

You can ask for an interpreter if you need one.

Family Violence Support

1800 Respect National Helpline

You can get help if you have experienced sexual assault, domestic or family violence and abuse.
You can call any time of day or night.
1800 737 732
1800respect.org.au

Disclaimer: This fact sheet provides general information only. For specific advice about your or your baby's healthcare needs, you should seek advice from your health professional. The Royal Women's Hospital does not accept any responsibility for loss or damage arising from your reliance on this fact sheet instead of seeing a health professional. If you or your baby require urgent medical attention, please contact your nearest emergency department.
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