

## Postpartum training and pelvic floor exercises

Right after giving birth, you may take deep slow breaths to help your senses calm down and your internal organs find their right place. You may lie on your abdomen, and if needed you may put a pillow under your abdomen for elevation.

Your abs have weakened and moved sideways during pregnancy and you should avoid training them immediately. First you should start strengthening your pelvic floor muscles which are also stretched out, but strengthening them with exercises is safe and important.

You may start with your pelvic floor muscle trainings already in the maternity hospital. Tighten your pelvic floor muscles slowly and then release the tension. Exercises can be performed, for example, during activities related to the baby (feeding, washing) or in the toilet after emptying the bladder.

The loosening of the pelvic floor muscles during pregnancy and giving birth may cause urinary incontinence, sometimes leakage of feces, decrease in sexual sensitivity, and later the pelvic organ prolapse. The research has shown that most women achieve significant improvement with pelvic floor exercises after three to four months of daily exercise.

Normal training could be started 2-3 months after delivery. Once the pelvic floor muscles have recovered, gentle exercise of the abdominal muscles could be started. Exercises that require a large range of movement and require strong muscle strength can damage the muscles, spine, and joints after childbirth. Contact your trainer, physiotherapist, midwife or gynecologist for further advice.

## Sex and contraception

The readiness for sex after childbirth depends on the woman's well-being and desire. It is common that the vagina is drier after giving birth, so you may use water-based lubricant to feel more comfortable. Menstruation usually begins 6-8 weeks after giving birth, but it may take up to two years. It is important to know that the first ovulation takes place before the first menstruation.

You may use a condom in the first weeks to prevent pregnancy. During a postpartum visit to your midwife or gynecologist, you can



consult the specialist about further contraception. There are many options you can choose from; it is important to find the best one for you and your partner.

## Postpartum depression

After giving birth, the mood changes are very common due to the hormones, lack of sleep, and changes in the family roles.

Baby blues include anxiety, crying, and irritability which last for about ten days after delivery. It occurs in almost half of the women who give birth.

Postpartum depression is characterized by decreased ability to concentrate, indecisiveness, slowing of thought, fatigue and exhaustion so that there is not enough energy to solve even a simple problem. It usually starts 2-3 months after delivery. Postpartum depression occurs in a third of women; most cases resolve without treatment within six months, but sometimes depression persists for much longer.

You may turn to pregnancy crisis counselor or psychologist for help. For more information visit [www.rasedus.ee](http://www.rasedus.ee). For free consultations you may call free helpline 8002008. The lines are open every day from 09:00 to 21:00.

*Having a baby is a dream come true, where not only a new life begins but a whole new world starts. We wish you and your family all the best!*

Text: midwife Krista Paltmann



# THE POSTPARTUM PERIOD

Women's clinic in West Tallinn central hospital  
has received the recognition of a  
baby-friendly hospital



We wish you the peace and time to go through the postpartum period which lasts up to 6-8 weeks. During this time, you go through hormonal changes, your blood circulation changes, and liquid balance in your body changes. Your life schedule has changed, that is why you are more sensitive both physically and emotionally. Try to find time to relax, take time for yourself, to eat, to sleep, and to rest.

**If you have a fever, unnatural vaginal discharge, or pain, please turn to the emergency room in women's clinic. Visit your midwife or doctor for a routine medical examination two months after giving birth.**

## Lochia and recovery of the uterus

Right after the delivery, the lochia (or the vaginal discharge) is bloody. As days go by, the bloody lochia starts turning more brown or pink and slimy, and ends up being white. The changes in the lochia are individual and may vary, but overall there should be less blood every day. The lochia should end completely by 8 weeks postpartum. After birth, the uterus recovery also takes place; the uterus starts to decrease in size and the cervix starts to close up. This may cause pain in your stomach. Within two months' time, you should avoid bath and swimming, and use a condom while having sex to avoid infections.

## Birth channel ruptures

If the ruptures in birth channel need stitches, it may feel uncomfortable, but it should not hurt. If needed, you should ask for more painkillers. If stitches are needed in vagina, perineum or cervix, we use resorbable sutures that do not need to be taken out later. It takes approximately two weeks for the stitches to heal, but they may feel tender for a longer time.

In case of perineal stitches, be careful with sitting. If you have had a C-section, try to avoid lifting heavy things.

The hygiene is very important: wash the area of the stitches in the shower and use a mild washing liquid. Dry the area properly and give it as much air as possible. If the stitches hurt, you may take painkillers. One gram of paracetamol four times a day is allowed. In case of perineum rupture, you may use cold compress or rub the area with buckthorn oil. You may ask for extra advice from your midwife, doctor, or pharmacist to find the best product for you.

## Postpartum inflammation

The signs of inflammation are body temperature over 38°C, the redness of the wound area or breast, swelling, pain, and bad smell of lochia. If you have pain or inflammation, you can take one gram of paracetamol four times a day. The bad hygiene of your hands and intimate area increases the risk of getting a postpartum inflammation.

The postpartum inflammation is not very common but it needs serious attention, that is why you need to consult your midwife or doctor or come to the women's clinic emergency room.

## Going to the toilet after birth

During the first days after birth, you may urinate more often and the bladder may feel more tender than usual. If during urination you feel discomfort, you may try urinating under warm water. Regularly emptying your bladder helps to decrease the risk of postpartum bleeding and uterus pain. Usually the urge to poo does not come in first two days as the intestines are empty after giving birth. You should prevent constipation. Do not be afraid that the stitches may tear, they will not. During the first days, wash yourself every time after using the toilet.

## Taking care of the breasts

A newborn needs feeding 8 to 12 times a day from the second day of his/her life. Frequent breastfeeding during the first days is useful for you, but as a result your nipples may start to feel tender. If the nipples start to hurt, please let the midwife or breastfeeding consultant check how your baby is grabbing the nipple or if the baby's position on the breast needs to be corrected. After breastfeeding, give your breast some air, use lanolin-based nipple cream, or make a compress on the nipples. Use the products that you can buy from the baby shops or pharmacy. Avoid washing your breasts too often.

In case of milk overflow, the whole breast is swollen and tender. When you touch your breast, you may feel bumps that resemble grapes. It is important that you continue breastfeeding often. Before breastfeeding, warm up your breast and massage the nipple area so that it is easier for the baby to grab it. After breastfeeding, put something cold on the breasts for at least 20 minutes, for example you may use clean cabbage leaves. To support your breasts you may use a bra without arch support that does not feel too tight.

## Eating and body weight after giving birth

Right after giving birth, the body weight drops very fast, then the body weight remains the same or even increases a little during a few days due to water retention. The weight stabilizes by the tenth postpartum week. The extra pounds that have accumulated in nine months usually disappear in the same amount of time.

It is important that you drink plenty of water and have a versatile menu which contains a lot of fruits and vegetables. Having a strict diet while breastfeeding is not recommended.

Do not have too much coffee or sweets. You should not have any alcohol or tobacco when you are breastfeeding or near the baby.

