



Recovering after birth

Good to know: Up until 6 weeks after giving birth you are a maternity woman. A lot is changing: physically, emotionally and socially. These changes are most noticeable in the first two weeks after giving birth. It is important to take sufficient rest during the maternity period. During the maternity period you can experience a number of inconveniences:

1. Pelvic floor complaints

During the delivery your pelvic floor muscles are stretched. After the delivery, these muscles slowly regain their old shape and strength. You may suffer from pelvic floor complaints. How do you recognize them and what can you do about it?

You may suffer from the following complaints:

- Leakage of urine, especially when coughing, sneezing and lifting (stress urinary incontinence)
- Inability to stop wind
- Loss of stool
- A strong feeling of pressure in the lower abdomen and pelvic floor
- Pain in the pelvic floor area, for example during cycling or pain during intercourse

Reducing complaints

About 6 weeks after childbirth, the complaints should decrease - possibly with exercises. If not, contact your doctor or a pelvic floor therapist.

Exercising pelvic floor muscles

If you are rested after childbirth, you can immediately start with a number of exercises to strengthen your pelvic floor muscles again.

Exercise

Lie on your back. Bend your knees, spread your feet lightly and place them flat on the floor or mattress. Try to retract your anus a little while exhaling. Then pull your pelvic floor slightly forward and tighten your abdomen. Release everything in reverse order. Then relax and few seconds. If this feels all right, you can repeat this a few times a day. The more you do it, the easier it will get. Then you can make the exercise a little more difficult by tensing the muscles for 5 to 10 seconds. In the meantime, keep breathing calmly.

More information

View the brochure on www.nvog.nl (146 KB). For more information about pelvic complaints and pelvic instability.

2. Blood loss

The first 24 hours after giving birth you usually suffer from a lot of blood loss. You can also lose clots during this process. Sometimes these are fist size. As long as you feel all right, it is okay. You lose too much blood if you have a full sanitary pad every 15 minutes. If so contact your midwife. It is normal to have to change pads about every 3 hours. The days after childbirth, the blood loss is usually (much) more than with a normal period. After a few days, the blood loss will subside. It can last for about 4 to 6 weeks. Then its is no longer bright red



blood loss, but somewhat browner. At the end of the maternity period, it will be more like white or yellow discharge. Check out www.thuisarts.nl for more information.

3. Stitches

We will tell you after your delivery whether you have stitches and, if so, how many there are. The first few days the stitches can feel painful. Tips:

- Take a hot shower in the morning and afternoon
- Sit on the stitches. Preferably on a hard surface
- Cool the stitches with cold compresses
- Take paracetamol

The first days after childbirth, urination is often sensitive. This is because urine is acidic and may sting into the wound. To remedy this, you can rinse with water while urinating, with the help of a jug for instance. Peeing in the shower can also be helpful. Don't put off urinating. The maternity nurse checks the stitches every day and will call us if something is not healing properly. Most stitches dissolve on their own. Around the 7th day after delivery, the remaining or painful stitches are removed.

4. Maternity tears

More than half of the maternity women suffer from maternity tears or baby blues. You can recognize maternity tears by sudden mood swings and/or unexpected crying spells. That's because fatigue sets in, your hormones are 'disturbed', you may suffer from engorgement and suddenly you have a baby that you have to take care of. On the 3rd to 5th day after childbirth you suddenly can become very emotional. It is all getting too much for you and you suddenly have to cry. Usually after a few days, the baby blues go away by itself. It is better to take it easy on these days and not receive too many maternity visits.

5. Contractions after the birth

You often have little or no painful contractions after a first delivery. You may suffer from this after a second or third birth. Paracetamol can help (maximum 6x 500mg per 24 hours). Breastfeeding reinforces the feeling of painful contractions. Contractions after the birth are there for a reason. They ensure that the uterus shrinks quickly and that you have less flow. The after-effects will lessen and disappear after a few days. A hot water bottle against your abdomen can sometimes bring relief.

6. Mental health problems

In the first period after childbirth, 1 in 8 women suffer from mild to very serious psychological complaints. How do you recognize them and what can be done about it?

Postnatal depression

You can recognize a postnatal depression by gloom, don't feel like doing anything, not wanting to eat, and not being able to sleep. Do you have gloomy moods that don't go away, lie awake all night, can't enjoy things (including your newborn baby; you may not want to hold him, or wish he had never been born), you have no appetite, and if you are dreading the day, talk to us or your maternity nurse about it. In 1 in 10 women, these depressed feelings do not



go away on their own after giving birth. They end up in a postpartum depression, or postnatal depression. This depression can last for weeks, months or sometimes longer.

Symptoms

There are different degrees of postnatal depression, from mild to severe. Crying, anxiety and irritability, worrying and poor sleep are the most characteristic features. Sometimes extra guidance is needed to build a good bond between you and the baby. In most cases, postnatal depression can be treated with therapy, medication, or a combination of both. So if you recognize these complaints, talk to us or the maternity nurse about it.

Posttraumatic stress disorder

When a drastic or life-threatening situation arises during childbirth - for example, an oxygen deficiency in the baby or an unexpected caesarean section - you can suffer from anxiety attacks and flashbacks. This is called post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This is about reliving a trauma; this creates fear and panic.

About 1-2% of women have a traumatic experience during childbirth that manifests itself in a post-traumatic stress disorder. PTSD is more common after an unplanned (emergency) caesarean section, in women who receive too little support during the traumatic event, and in those who have difficulty coping with stress.

Symptoms

With a post-traumatic stress disorder, you suffer from poor sleep due to nightmares or recurring images of the traumatic event. It can be difficult to care for your baby because he or she reminds you too much of the traumatic event. Other complaints are irritability, many startle reactions and excessive vigilance. It helps to talk about it, both with your partner and family, your midwife and a psychologist.

Good preparation

PTSD can sometimes be prevented by proper preparation for childbirth and a birth plan. This way you have as realistic a picture as possible of what is about to happen and you can make your wishes known.

Maternity psychosis

Maternity psychosis - also called postpartum psychosis (PPP) - is a psychosis that develops after childbirth. You can recognize maternity psychosis by: delusions, hallucinations, suspicion and confusion. Prior to the psychotic symptoms, you often sleep poorly, become restless, irritable or agitated. These first symptoms can start a few hours to a few weeks after giving birth, but stopping breastfeeding is also sometimes a reason. Postpartum psychosis is very rare, affecting 1 to 2 in 1000 women.

Symptoms

With a postpartum psychosis you can suffer from an enormous amount of energy, distrust, fear, violent thoughts, voices in your head, hallucinations, no sense of time, or confusion. You may feel like you are getting insane. This can be very frightening. These symptoms do not have to occur at the same time. Get help as soon as possible if you notice that you are losing your grip on reality. If you have a postpartum psychosis, you lose the insight that you are ill.



More information

- Pop-outpatient clinic for pregnant women and women who have recently given birth with psychological complaints
- Would you like more information about psychological problems after childbirth? Then view the website of the Landelijk Kenniscentrum Psychiatrie en Zwangerschap (National Knowledge Centre for Psychiatry and Pregnancy)
- Overview of national treatment centres / POP outpatient clinics

7. Muscle pain

Giving birth is like running a marathon. And that is for good reason. After a (normal) delivery, it is also normal to have muscle pain and stiffness all over your body.

Tip: take it easy and let yourself be pampered, so that your body gets time to recover.

8. Bowel movement

You usually have no stools for the first few days. It can be difficult to have bowel movements again, but often it is not too bad.

Tips:

- Drink plenty of water
- Eat fibre rich food
- Take time for eating and drinking

9. Rest

Giving birth is tough. Therefore your body also needs time and rest to recover. Of course it is nice if you feel physically well again soon after giving birth, but take it easy. When the maternity nurse is gone, you will have to do it on your own. In addition, you still have to feed at night. So try to rest when the baby is sleeping. When you are tired you can tolerate much less, which can make you feel like you are losing control.

10. Getting used to the baby

The first time with your baby is for getting to know each other. The arrival of your baby has a major impact on your life. You need time to get used to this. Your baby needs love, security and safety. If your baby cries, it's better to pick him or her up and comfort her. This gives him or her confidence. And the more you connect with your baby, the better you will understand him or her.

11. Uncertainty

Uncertainty about parenthood is common: Can you do it all? Was this what you had in mind? Take comfort: as time goes on, you often gain more confidence!

12. To sweat

Sometimes you sweat so much that you have to put on a dry shirt in the middle of the night. This is a normal phenomenon which will disappear spontaneously.

13. De-pregnantizing

After giving birth, the process of recovering from the delivery begins, which can take 9 months. This means that your body will return to its original state. Major changes take place in the



hormone production of your body. Hormone levels drop temporarily and become even lower than before pregnancy. Your body produces much less progesterone and oestrogen, and immediately after giving birth it starts producing hormones that stimulate milk production and cause the uterus to contract. You may suffer from:

- Fatigue
- Irritability
- Concentration problems
- Gloom
- Backache
- Headache
- Hair loss
- Irregular or absent periods
- Not feeling fit

What if the complaints don't pass?

Some women continue to suffer from complaints such as gloom, fatigue or irritability. Not everyone is on a pink cloud! In fact, most women are not on a pink cloud or only for a short while... Don't keep worrying, but discuss this with us or your family doctor.

14. Getting used to new life

There are women who are on a pink cloud after the birth of a child and just enjoy everything. Yet most women notice that recovering from childbirth and getting used to a new life with a baby is quite tough.