

# Common Postpartum Discomforts

## **Bleeding:**

Called "Lochia," it occurs in 3 stages. The first stage is red, lasting for about 3 days. The second is watery-pink, lasting for 1-3 weeks, and the third is yellowish-white, lasting invariably. Change your pads frequently to ensure dryness. You may stop bleeding and then restart bright red bleeding several times during the first six weeks after delivery. Passing clots is also common during the post-partum period. They can be bright red, dark red, small or large and are frequently associated with severe cramping. Ibuprofen helps with the pain. Call for excessive bleeding, soaking a pad in one hour with bright red blood or passing large clots..

## **Cesarean incision:**

Your scar may pucker and be tender for 2-3 months as it heals. It is common to feel numbness up to the umbilicus for 6 months. The edges of the incision may be more swollen than the center because of knots used to close the layers being located at the sides of the incision. It is normal for the pain to be asymmetrical. The top of the incision frequently hangs over the lower edge during the healing process until the lymphatic system begins to function normally. Call the office if the incision becomes red, more inflamed or more tender, or begins to leak fluid.

## **Constipation:**

Constipation is caused by hormonal changes, dehydration, breast feeding and inactivity. Try increasing the fiber in your diet, drinking more water, and using stool softeners.

## **Cramping:**

These are due to the uterus contracting as it returns to normal size. These may be increased with breastfeeding. We recommend changing your position often, emptying your bladder often, using a heating pad, and/or taking ibuprofen to help with the pain.

## **Emotional changes:**

It is normal to feel overwhelmed, exhausted and sleep deprived. The lifestyle changes, exhaustion, and fluctuating hormones frequently cause anxiety and feelings of helplessness. Ask for help when you need it. Please schedule an appointment if you feel that you may be developing post-partum depression.

## **Episiotomy:**

Use ice packs the first 1-2 days. Taking a warm bath, using a sitz bath, a spray bottle, or a rubber ring may also help. As you heal, you may notice the stitches beginning to pull and itch. The swelling also decreases so the stitches begin to loosen. Sutures used in repairing an episiotomy are absorbed by the body over the next 6 weeks.

## **Hair Loss:**

Thinning hair is normal post-partum, with the most noticeable change 5-6 months after delivery.

## **Hemorrhoids:**

Try Preparation H, Anusol creams, dry heat, and a spray bottle.

## **Hot flashes:**

Hot flashes occur frequently when nursing. The body treats nursing like menopause with all the same symptoms due to lack of estrogen. Hot flashes, depression, and vaginal dryness all increase during breast feeding. Starting a combination oral contraceptive pill will help the symptoms.

**Leg Swelling:**

It is normal for your legs to swell after the delivery. There are large fluid shifts after delivery. This usually resolves by your 6 week post-partum check.

**Sex:**

You may attempt intercourse 3-4 weeks after a C-section or vaginal delivery without an episiotomy. If you had a vaginal delivery with an episiotomy, wait until after your post-partum visit. You may need to use lubrication (we recommend Astroglide or KY Jelly), especially if you are breastfeeding.

**Swollen Breasts:**

If you are not breastfeeding, try using ice packs, wearing a tight-fitting bra 24 hours/day and avoiding stimulation of the breasts.

**Urinary leakage:**

Urinary stress incontinence is caused by decreased perineal muscle tone. Do Kegel exercises to reverse the process.

**Vaginal dryness:**

Vaginal dryness is caused by breast feeding. Lubrication may help the symptoms. It can be treated with prescription estrogen products that are placed vaginally.

**Symptoms to report immediately:**

1. Excessive bleeding, soaking a pad in one hour with bright red blood, or passing large clots
2. Chills or fever over 100.4 degrees.
3. Severe pain
4. Persistent headache, changes in vision, rapid swelling of face, feet, hands or overall body.
5. Increased pain, redness, swelling odor or discharge from episiotomy site or cesarean incision.
6. Depression lasting more than 2-4 weeks.
7. Breast infection - fever in association with red, painful breast.
8. Bladder infection - frequency, urgency, or pain with urination.