



Postnatal care for all mothers

Why is postnatal care important?

- When you have a baby, naturally the attention will be focused on the care and well-being of your little miracle. A lot of mothers simply accept that being a new mum is exhausting and do not seek further support for their own needs and self-care.
- However, postnatal care should not be underestimated nor overlooked. Postnatal care can help **identify medical and psychological conditions** that may occur after pregnancy as well as provide the mother with the necessary **support** she needs to provide the optimum care for her baby.

What postnatal care can I expect after having a baby?

A follow-up appointment with your obstetrician:

- To make sure any complications post-delivery, such as bleeding or wound problems, have resolved or continue to be treated.
- A pap smear/ HPV test may be recommended if you have not had one recently
- Contraception is usually discussed.
- Your obstetrician may also talk to you about how you are coping and explore your mood as many emotions can be experienced during this postnatal period.
 - ⇒ If there are no immediate post-delivery medical problems, then you may not have further obstetric follow-up. However, a visit to your GP can provide you with further advice and support during the postpartum period.

What are the most common postnatal problems I should look out for?

Lifestyle – Being tired all the time seems to be something most mums expect after having a baby. Caring for a new baby is certainly exhausting so it's important to be mindful of this **and not neglect self-care**. Ensuring you are **getting adequate hours of sleep or rest** by getting additional support from family members or external resources such as a helper, confinement or night nannies, can allow you to have the much needed rest. **Taking a short walk** with your baby daily will allow you to get some gentle exercise and fresh air, as well as enjoying the calming effect from being out in nature. Making sure you are **eating a nutritious meal** will replenish your minerals and vitamins whilst giving you the energy you need during this time. Taking the right lifestyle measures will help you to function optimally.

Medical - Pregnancy utilizes a huge amount of nutrients to help with the development of the baby. Depending on the type of delivery you have had, your body may take time and sufficient nutrient to heal and recover. Some women will experience **nutrient deficiencies** that may result in symptoms of *extreme fatigue, hair loss and 'foggy' head*. A consultation and blood test can help identify these deficiencies, which can be replaced by **natural sources** or **with supplements**. Certain medical conditions are seen more commonly in the postpartum period. These include constipation, haemorrhoids and certain thyroid conditions

Psychological – Many women experience some form of **'baby blues'** after giving birth. This may be due to a combination of changes in hormone levels, underlying or previous mental health problems together with the responsibility and challenges of looking after a newborn. Many mums will feel anxious and overwhelmed. These feelings are often temporary lasting from a few days to weeks. Some will find relief by **talking to family, friends or joining a support group of new mums**. For others however, the mood change may be more pronounced and last longer. During post-partum visits your doctor may ask specific questions that are tailored to assess your mood and identify more serious postpartum mood changes that may need support with counselling or possibly medication. Without professional assessment, post-partum depression can be overlooked.....

Pelvic floor – Growing and carrying a baby can put a lot of strain on the pelvic floor muscles that support your expanding uterus and growing baby. Most women will experience some **urinary incontinence** soon after childbirth, which resolves shortly afterwards, but for some this problem may persist. Pelvic floor weakness may also result in other problems such as a uterine prolapse or more rarely faecal incontinence. Simple exercises together with **Pilates** may be sufficient for some women, whilst others would benefit from a thorough **assessment by a physiotherapist** specialising in women's health.

Breast feeding – Though breast-feeding is 'natural', many women struggle with this. **Getting the timely and correct lactation advice can make a huge impact** on a new mother and her decision whether to continue breast-feeding or not. A qualified lactation consultant and your GP are at hand to advice on lactation issues and to treat medical conditions related to breast-feeding. Once established, breast-feeding not only provides your little one with the best nutrition available, but is also free and convenient.

Conclusion

Postnatal care is an important part of any pregnancy. New mothers should be encouraged to seek help and support post-delivery to ensure postnatal problems are identified and treated quickly to ensure that mum can achieve her optimum health and provide the best care for her baby.

Please speak to your doctor or your well-baby nurse today if you are unsure or have any questions regarding breastfeeding