

Post-Natal Short Term Advice & Guidance

Stitches

Initially, you will be able to see the stitches on the outside, but there will also be stitches on the inside that you cannot see. The stitches dissolve in time. Occasionally a stitch may fall out and you will see it on your maternity pad. This is nothing to worry about.

You will be sent home from hospital with antibiotics. This is to reduce the risk of infection passing from your bowel into the healing tissues. Try to keep the area clean to reduce the risk of infection. Only use water when washing (no soaps or shower gels), change sanitary pads regularly (wash hands before and after), and always wipe from front to back.

If you experience an increase in pain, an increase in bleeding, or become aware of an unpleasant smell, then contact your GP. Some women need an extra course of antibiotics, especially in the first 6 weeks.

Pain

Pain in the area may last 4-6 weeks. You may find it difficult to sit down properly and standing for long periods might also be uncomfortable. Take prescribed pain relief for as long as you feel it is needed. When you feel like reducing your dosage, don't stop your pain killers all at once. Decrease your dosage gradually.

Try to sit properly as sitting in a twisted position often leads to other aches and pains in your back, pelvis and shoulders. Many people find they need a soft surface to sit on (e.g. an extra cushion). However, some women prefer a hard seat as the pressure is then taken through the bones in the pelvis. Some women find that avoiding contact with a seat pad works best for them. To do this, roll up a pair of towels, then sit with one underneath each bottom cheek. Women occasionally try sitting on an inflatable ring (such as a child might have when learning how to swim) but many women find these can worsen pain and swelling in the area.

Bowel Management

You will have been sent home from hospital with laxatives. These will be at a high dosage initially. These will make your stools loose and easy to pass. Initially, because your stools will be looser, you may experience some faecal urgency and possibly some faecal leakage on the way to the bathroom. This is to be expected at this early stage so try not to be upset or distressed by this.

To avoid leakage of loose stools, women may be tempted to stop taking laxatives. However, it is very important to avoid constipation. So, in short, you may need to put up with a little leakage in the short term for a better long term recovery.

It is advisable to cut down on laxatives gradually, monitoring your bowel function. If you feel you are becoming constipated again, it is fine to return to a higher dose for a short period before trying again. Many women find they have to take a small amount of laxatives for quite a lot longer than they imagined. Even if your bowels were normal before your delivery, taking laxatives for up to 3 months post-natal is not uncommon. Regular fluid intake, and eating a diet with lots of fruit and vegetables will also help.

Women with a third- or fourth-degree tear may also have pain on opening their bowels. This is a common part of your recovery. Continue with pain killers and laxatives until this has settled. Some women might find that a different position on the toilet can also help.

Try the following position:

- Lean forward with your hands or forearms resting on your thighs
- Keep your head facing forward, creating a curve at the base of your spine
- Make sure that your knees are well apart and are higher than your hips (you may need to take your underwear to your ankles for this)
- Use a footstool (or a couple of toilet rolls) under each foot
- Relax your mouth and jaw
- Try to breathe to the bottom of your lungs, relaxing your belly as you do so
- Bulge your tummy muscles forward as you take a breath in
- Relax your anal sphincter to open your bottom and let the stool out
- If you need to, a few small, short, quick pushes to get things started is alright but avoid straining and pushing excessively



General Recovery

Rest and recovery are very important at this stage. Getting as much sleep as you can, and optimising your nutrition will help tissue healing.

Many women feel a pressure to “bounce back” after their delivery but it is important to take things easy at the beginning, gradually increasing your activity level. If your pain level is still very high, then it is possible that you are overdoing things. Also, many women find that, if they increase their activities too quickly, then their bowel symptoms can worsen. If this happens, then ease back for a week or two.