



Kansas City

# YOUR POSTPARTUM BODY

WHAT TO EXPECT  
Day 1, Week 1, Month 1, and beyond

Your body goes through a lot of incredible changes during pregnancy. And once your baby enters the world, you can expect more physical changes as you recover from childbirth. Knowing what to expect can make the days and weeks after you give birth easier. Our guide will help you feel prepared to navigate what's ahead.



## Your body on Day 1

Today is about meeting your baby for the first time. You'll get to snuggle with your little one while you rest up after childbirth. Everyone's labor and delivery is different, but here are some of the physical symptoms you may experience.

- **Fatigue**

Giving birth is stressful and tiring on both the body and mind. And it's normal to feel worn out as your body recovers. For one thing, you may not have slept for a while if you had a long labor. You also might have lost blood during labor and birth.

- **Uterine cramping**

Right after birth, contractions cause your uterus to start shrinking. This often comes with uterine cramps, also called afterpains. These cramps will ease over time

as your uterus returns to its prebirth state. Right now, your uterus is round and hard and weighs about 2½ pounds. By six weeks after giving birth, it will only weigh about 2 ounces.

- **Perineum soreness**

Your perineum is the area between your vagina and your anus. Giving birth vaginally can stretch and sometimes tear this area. Some of these tears are minor and will heal on their own. You'll feel more sore if you had an episiotomy.

## Did you have a C-section?

A cesarean birth, or C-section, is when your baby is delivered through surgical incisions in your abdomen and uterus. It's **major surgery**, so you'll need time to recover. You may feel pain from the incisions once the anesthesia wears off. Your doctor can prescribe pain medication. Expect to stay in the hospital for **two to four days**.

That's when a doctor makes a surgical cut to widen the opening of the vagina during delivery. The doctor stitches up the perineum to help the tear or episiotomy heal.

The healing process from a tear or episiotomy usually takes two to three weeks. If you get stitches, they should dissolve in about six weeks. Your provider will give you a list of things you can do to ease discomfort.

## We're here to help

The free Blue KC Care Management app makes it easy to access pregnancy support. Download it from the App Store or Google Play. Use the access code *kclinksupport* to get started. Prefer to talk? Call **816-395-2060**. Calls will be returned no later than the next business day.

## MY NOTES

### Questions I want to ask my doctor about delivery day:

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## Your body in Week 1

The first few days at home with your baby can be exciting and overwhelming. Your body is still in recovery mode, so try to give yourself time to rest and heal. You can expect some of these common physical changes in the first few weeks.

- **Vaginal discharge**

The discharge – called lochia – is made up of the tissue and blood that lined your uterus while you were pregnant. For the first few days, it will be heavy and bright red, like a period. It may also include blood clots. You can use sanitary pads to absorb the discharge. Over time, the lochia will lessen and become watery.

- **Breast engorgement**

Your breasts will swell and fill with milk a few days after you give birth. If it's your first baby, it may take a little longer. Your breasts may feel

full, hard, and warm. If you start breastfeeding regularly, the discomfort should ease. If you decide not to breastfeed, the pain can last until your breasts stop making milk.

- **Urinary issues**

Some new moms have trouble urinating, even though they feel the need to go. Or you may feel pain or burning when you do urinate. Drinking lots of water can help. Others might leak urine or have trouble stopping their flow. Try doing Kegel exercises to improve bladder control.

## How to do Kegels

These exercises strengthen the muscles supporting your pelvis, bladder, and uterus. To get started:

- 1 Squeeze the muscles you use to stop the flow of urine. Those are your pelvic floor muscles.**
- 2 Hold for 10 seconds, then release. Do this 10 times in a row.**
- 3 Try to do Kegels three times a day. You can do them while watching videos, waiting in line — almost anywhere!**

- **Baby blues**

Hormonal changes in the days after childbirth can trigger major mood swings. You may feel anxious, sad and upset, or cry for no reason. This is known as the “baby blues.” It’s a short-term condition that happens to about 80% of new moms, says the March of Dimes.

Sleep deprivation can make the blues worse. Feeling down like this usually lasts a few days to a few weeks. If the baby blues don’t go away or become worse, talk with your doctor. It could be postpartum depression.



## Your body in Month 1 (and beyond)

Things might still feel like a blur, but you should be getting used to your baby’s rhythms by now. The pain and soreness from childbirth should be better too. Keep an eye out for these changes in the weeks ahead.

- **Postpartum depression and/or anxiety**

The baby blues are normal. But some new moms get a more serious condition known as postpartum depression. You can also develop postpartum anxiety, either on its own or with depression. Symptoms of depression can include severe mood swings, trouble bonding with your baby, and feelings of hopelessness. Anxiety symptoms can include excessive worrying, feeling panicked, and irrational fears.

If you feel sad or anxious most of the time for more than two weeks, tell your doctor right away. Treatment like therapy and medicine work. Your doctor will get you the help you need.

- **Weight loss**

Most women lose around 13 pounds during childbirth alone. That includes the weight of the baby, placenta, and amniotic fluid. Try not to stress about losing more right now. Your doctor will let you know when it’s safe to get back to exercise.

- **Tummy bulge**

Your belly just spent the last nine months growing and stretching alongside your little one. It can take weeks or months before your abdominal muscles heal and start to tighten up.

- **Lower sex drive**

Many doctors recommend waiting until six weeks before you have sex again. Levels of the hormone estrogen plummet after birth, so some women have less interest in sex. You may notice some vaginal dryness as well. Using a water-based lubricant can help. Be open with your partner about how you feel. It’s okay to take your time. And don’t be shy about bringing up the issue with your doctor.

By six to eight weeks after giving birth, your postpartum body should be well on the way to recovery. But it can take as long as six months (or more) to fully recover. Try to be patient as your body heals.

### MY NOTES

#### Questions I want to ask my doctor:

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Sources: March of Dimes; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.