

Congratulations on your new baby!

Whether this is your first birth or you have already had several others, expanding your family is a time filled with a lot of change, challenges and joy. We are honored that you have chosen Advanced Women's Healthcare to be part of your pregnancy, delivery and postpartum care.

In the coming days and months, many things about your life will be extremely baby focused and centered as you adjust your family life to include this new member and seek to meet all of his or her needs. In the midst of all this change, it is important not to forget to take care of yourself too. One thing that can be frustrating in our culture is that you get a lot of care and attention while pregnant, and then after the baby is born sometimes the attention all shifts-it can feel like we have all forgotten that mom has needs too!

The goal of this resource is to give you the tools to understand some of the changes your body has just gone through so you can understand some of the things that you may feel postpartum, know if what you are feeling is abnormal or concerning, and know who to contact if you have concerns or just want to be checked out. We want to take care of you (and give you and your support system the tools to take care of you) so that you are able to take care of your newest family member.

Your body after baby

You have just been through nine months of change culminating in a huge event, a change like no other. Whether you had a vaginal delivery or a C-section, a normal uncomplicated birth or one with lots of complexities, your body has had to deal with a lot. It can be very hard in the postpartum period to know what things are normal and what might be the sign of a problem.

You are also embarking on a journey where you will need to use your body very differently. Even if you have had a baby or babies before, going back to caring for a newborn 24/7 can be quite the challenge. It's like a never-ending workout and you don't even really get to work your way up to it. This can lead to some aches and pains. Some of these will go away as your body gets stronger, some can be avoided with careful attention to your body movements; and some may be signs of a larger problem that could be addressed before it really becomes an issue.

Your breasts

If you are nursing, invest in good, supportive nursing bras that fit your body. Nursing bras are different as they have clasps/openings to allow easy access for your nursing baby. Even if you are not nursing, breast size can increase and investing in a good fitting bra can reduce back pain.

Your pelvic floor

The pelvic floor is a group of muscles that line the inside of your pelvis and function like a sling that holds up your organs and helps provide stability for your lower back and legs. They also help with bladder/bowel function and sexual function. During pregnancy, the pelvic floor has extra pressure and stress on it from supporting the growing baby, and during delivery it has to stretch significantly to allow the baby to exit. It can also undergo trauma during delivery if interventions such as episiotomy, forceps or vacuum are needed or if you have tearing.

If left untreated, pelvic floor dysfunction can lead to pain or other issues that can worsen with time and make it difficult to enjoy life with your newly expanded family.

Symptoms of problems with your pelvic floor that are common after delivery include:

- Incontinence (leaking of urine) especially with coughing, sneezing and exercise
- Pain in your back, hips or legs
- Pain with intercourse
- Pain with bowel movements or difficulty with bowel movements
- Heaviness/pressure in your pelvis

None of these symptoms are considered normal. If you experience any of these things for more than six weeks postpartum, it would be helpful to be evaluated by our women's health professionals to see if you need treatment.

PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES/KEGELS

It is common for women to be advised to do Kegel exercises to strengthen their pelvic floors. These can be extremely helpful, but only if they are done correctly. 1) Think about tightening around both vaginal and rectal opening trying to close those openings and pull up and inward as if trying to stop urine flow or stop from passing gas at the same time. Relax. Repeat 10 times. 2) Then try to hold for 3-5 seconds. Relax for 3-5 seconds. Repeat 10 times. (Once you have mastered 5 sec you can progress up to 10 sec.) Do 2-3 sets per day. These are great to practice while you are feeding your baby.

>>>Check out our Facebook page for a video from our pelvic floor physical therapist on Kegels.

Studies show that greater than two-thirds of women do Kegels incorrectly, which can actually increase their risk of incontinence or pelvic organ prolapse.

If you feel you are unable to do Kegels correctly or if you experience pain or nausea while doing them, see our pelvic floor physical therapist who can teach you how to do them properly. Talk to your provider about how to get started with physical therapy right here in our office!

ABDOMINAL AND CORE MUSCLES

These muscles get very stretched during pregnancy and may become weak as a result. Most women can safely resume gentle core exercise and strengthening within a few weeks of delivery (if you have a C-section you need to wait until you are cleared by your physician). There is a condition known as diastasis recti that is very common in postpartum women. This condition is caused by a separation of the abdominal muscles due to be stretched or overused and it may contribute to low back pain, core weakness and a looser appearance of the abdominal area. If you have pain or problems with doing core exercise, or if you are concerned you may have a diastasis recti please seek help by contacting your physician or physical therapist.

SEX AFTER BABY

Most practitioners recommend waiting until after your 6 week appointment to start having sex again. If your doctor has cleared you before that, it is certainly fine to start it earlier as well.

The most important thing to know about postpartum sex is that it should not hurt. There are many things that can happen during pregnancy and labor and delivery that can lead to painful sex, but these are not considered normal and can usually be treated successfully.

Common things to try if you are having painful sex:

- Longer foreplay or new positions
 - Your baby's first year is a time of wonder and excitement-and exhaustion. It may take a little bit of effort to reach and appropriate level of arousal and that's ok! Sometimes the changes in your vagina and pelvic floor after birth may mean that positions that used to be enjoyable may not be now. See if you can find new positions that you and your partner can both enjoy.
- Water based lubricant
 - The hormone fluctuations in your body after having a baby can make the amount of lubricant your body produces decrease, so even if you have never needed lubricant before, you may want some now. This is especially true if you are breastfeeding. Astroglide or Slippery Stuff are both preferred to KY because they are water based instead of petroleum jelly based and therefore, more similar to your body's natural lubricant. There will also be less friction, which can be very helpful for you as you seek to return to sexual activity. If you want to use a natural substance, cooking oils or emu oil are generally very nonirritating to the skin.

If you have tried these tips without success, our women's health specialists can evaluate your pelvic floor to check for scar tissue, muscle spasms or other problems that may be causing prolonged pain when attempting to have sex. They are trained to help you return to a normal, healthy sexual life as soon as possible.

Constipation

Constipation is very common in new mothers, especially if they have had a C-section, or an episiotomy.

Constipation may be a problem if you:

- Regularly have to strain with bowel movements
- Have hard or lumpy stools
- Feel you are not emptying completely
- Have less than three bowel movements per week

Homework:

- Increase fluid and fiber in your diet.
- Try to add gentle physical activity, such as walking, to your daily routine.
- Initially after childbirth, you may want to support the perineum (the area between your vagina and anus) with a clean pad or folded washcloth. Gentle pressure can help support stitches and allow you to relax your pelvic floor enough to enable a bowel movement.
- Use a good toileting technique: lean forward and rest your elbows on your thighs. Ideally, your knees should be higher than your hips – either raise your heels, or rest your feet on a small stool or bench. Don't hold your breath when you are defecating! Try and make your waist wide and big, as if you have swallowed a balloon. Relax and soften around your anus. When you exhale, try and gently bear down, as if you are bulging out your anus. If you don't succeed after 10 minutes, try again later.



Recovering from a C-section

A C-section is a major abdominal surgery and it is important to allow your body to fully heal. Pushing your body too hard after a C-section can lead to increased internal scar tissue formation, which can cause problems with pain, bladder and bowel function in the future. Ask your doctor for specific discharge instructions, but in general the following guidelines are helpful:

- Don't lift more than the weight of your baby (lifting extra weight can put pressure on your abdomen, promote scar tissue formation and delay healing).
- Roll over onto your side first before sitting up (log roll method) to avoid straining the healing muscles in your belly.

Scar Massage after a C-Section

In the first few weeks after a C-section, it is important to monitor for any signs of infection: redness, oozing, swelling or an increase in pain.

Once you have attended your post-partum check-up, usually at six/eight weeks, your doctor may give you clearance to begin massaging your scar. *It is very important that you do not begin scar massage without discussing it with your doctor.*

Why is scar massage important?

As the tissues in your abdomen heal after surgery, they may become 'stuck' to each other, or to other structures in the pelvis. Some women may develop issues with their bladder or low back pain because of scar tissue adhesions. Scar massage is an easy technique that may prevent this.

How do I start?

Initially, you may want to focus on the tissues above and below the incision line. Lying down comfortably, perhaps with your knees bent, place one hand on your tummy. Don't place your hands directly on your incision, but perhaps a little above (closer to your ribs). Don't use lotion as you want to be able to gently move the skin on your tummy without sliding.

Gently move your hand from side to side, then up and down. If you notice any restrictions, gently hold your hand there for twenty seconds or so. You may feel a gentle release, or it may take a few sessions before you start to feel any movement. Try the same process below your incision site. Gently place your hand on your lower tummy. See if you can move the skin side to side, then up and down.

Try it in a couple of different areas of both your upper and lower abdomen.

Direct Scar Massage:

Your therapist will be able to guide you when you are ready to progress to working directly on the incision site.

There are a number of different techniques you can use.

Start at one end of the incision. Place the tips of your fingers lightly on your skin. See if you can move the skin up and down, right and left. Can you gently rotate it clockwise and anti-clockwise?

Work your way down the length of the scar in this manner.

Another technique you can try is skin rolling:

Gently 'pinch' the incision between your fingers and thumb and lightly roll it back and forth.

Be kind to yourself. This shouldn't be painful! Only massage as much as is comfortable.



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Postpartum mental health

Planning for the birth of your child often comes with planning new life routines. But what about planning for your mental health postpartum? It's important to know that with hormone fluctuations, schedule disruptions, and family changes, caring for a new baby can be a special, but challenging time. Consideration of your mental health will be instrumental in helping you manage these changes. Here's a list of helpful reminders for coping:

- 1) Recognize postpartum depression or anxiety come in many different forms. Increased feelings of sadness, hopelessness/helplessness or lack of motivation can be common. But for some, you may experience increased feelings of anxiety, including racing thoughts, obsessive thoughts or compulsive behaviors.
- 2) Reach out to your support system. Having a new baby can often feel isolating, so make sure you have a strong support system through family, friends or support groups (e.g. Postpartum Support International).
- 3) Be patient with your new lifestyle. Don't try to force yourself back into old routines or habits too quickly! Self-care is imperative during this time, so allowing for some rest and

relaxation is key. Allow yourself the opportunity to develop new routines that better suit your current life.

- 4) Seek help. Postpartum depression and anxiety affect many women and can be treated through counseling services. Remember, you are not alone!

If you are experiencing overwhelming sadness or anxiety, we are here to help. Our counseling services are tailored to pre/postpartum mental health concerns and can assist you in gaining more control over your symptoms of distress. Contact us today to schedule an appointment with our licensed counselor!

Postpartum return to activity

It is very tempting to want to jump right back into an exercise routine and your normal activity now that you have your body back to yourself! However, if you do that too soon, you can actually prolong the time it takes for your body to return to normal. The biggest key to successful recovery is to pay attention to your body. Don't try to push it beyond what feels comfortable to do.

For the first 3 or 4 weeks postpartum (even up to 6 weeks for some people depending on how your body is doing) you should spend a lot of time resting. Make sure you are eating and drinking enough sleep whenever you have the opportunity. During this time your body is recovering not only from birth, but also from the pregnancy process. **If your bleeding or pain increases, that is a sign you are trying to do too much and you should rest more.**

You can do some VERY gentle core strengthening in the first few weeks postpartum. You can also start doing some gently walking if your body feels up to it. (See exercises in booklet as sit ups and crunches are not the best exercise, can increase unnecessary pressure on the pelvic floor and should be avoided.)

You should wait 6-8 weeks before returning to any type of impact exercise (running, jumping, fast walking, aerobics, jazzercise, etc.). This is because during this period of time postpartum, your uterus is shrinking back down and returning to its normal position in your pelvic cavity and your pelvic floor is recovering. It is not yet ready to handle repeated impact. NOTE: If you are breastfeeding *and* your monthly cycle has *not* returned, you may consider taking even longer to return to higher impact activities. Estrogen has to decrease in order to produce milk. Estrogen allows these tissues to be more supportive and lack of estrogen causes lack of support to the pelvic floor and pelvic organs. Listen to your body with activity. Again, if you have increased pain or any bleeding, that is a sign that your body is not ready.

The following symptoms may indicate a pelvic floor problem if they persist past the first 6 weeks and should be evaluated by a women's health practitioner:

- Leakage of urine while laughing, coughing or sneezing or exercising
- Pain with intercourse or during exercise activity
- Heaviness, pressure or "falling out" feeling in the vaginal area (pelvic organ prolapse)

Postpartum body mechanics

Carrying your baby

- Carry your baby as close to your chest and stomach as possible, not off to the side
- Tighten your tummy muscles to help support your back
- Using a baby carrier can be very helpful in providing support for your back and neck and distributing your baby's weight evenly

Feeding

- Breastfeeding: use pillows underneath your arm so that your arm (and baby) are resting on the pillows and you are not bending forward or straining to lift baby up for the entire session. Remember to bring baby to you and not yourself to baby.
- Bottle feeding: use pillows as need to support your back and your baby so that you are able to be in a supported position and not leaning forward or straining.

Carrying the car seat

- The ideal way is to hold it like a laundry basket near the middle of your body.
- If you need to carry baby on the side, try to keep your elbow bent so that you can have the baby near the center of your body and have the best support possible.
- Keep tummy tight and do not arch your back or lean to support the baby.

Pushing a stroller

- If your stroller has adjustable handles, try to adjust them so that you can have some bend in your elbows while you push
- Keep your head up and your shoulders over your hips
- Keep your tummy tight and do not arch your back

Changing your baby's diaper

- Try to change the baby in a position that is just a little above your waist to decrease the need for you to bend over and strain your back
- If you need to change the baby on the floor or another low surface, keep your tummy tight and try not to slouch

Lifting your baby

- Keep your tummy tight
- Bend your knees to lower yourself down instead of bending your back
- Lift baby close to your chest, then tighten your tummy again before standing

Carrying your baby



Feeding



PARENTING POSTURES: THE CARSEAT



Lifting Baby



Wrong



Right

PARENTING POSTURES: THE STROLLER

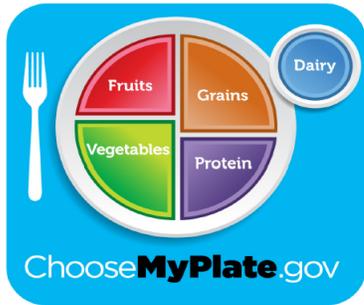


PARENTING POSTURES: CHANGING DIAPERS



Postpartum Nutrition

Your Nutritional Needs as a New Mom



MyPlate is a great guide to use for planning and portioning your meals. Mothers who are breastfeeding will have increased needs compared to those who are not breastfeeding.

Visit <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/MyPlatePlan> to calculate your own unique nutrition needs!

It's recommended to make half your plate fruits and vegetables, a quarter lean protein, and the other quarter should be made up of grains. When choosing grains, make at least half of them whole grains. A balanced diet should also include low fat dairy. See the chart below for specific daily servings of each food group.

	Breastfeeding	Breastfeeding + formula	Postpartum	Examples of Servings
Grains	8 oz	7 oz	6 oz	1 oz = 1 slice bread, 1/2 C cooked pasta, rice, or cereal, 1 C ready to eat cereal
Dairy	3 Cups	3 Cups	3 Cups	1 serving = 1 C milk, 8 oz yogurt, 1.5 oz cheese
Vegetables	3 Cups	3 Cups	2.5 Cups	1 serving = 1 C fresh or cooked veggies, 2 C raw, leafy veggies
Fruits	2 Cups	2 Cups	1.5 Cups	1 serving = 1 medium piece of fruit, 1/2 large fruit, 1 C canned, fresh, or frozen fruit
Protein	6.5 oz	6 oz	5 oz	1 oz = 1 oz lean meat, 1 large egg, 1 T peanut butter, 1/3 C unsalted nuts

Source: <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/moms-pregnancy-breastfeeding>

Quick, Healthy Snack Ideas

- Trail mix
- Veggies and hummus
- Yogurt and granola
- Apples and nut butter
- Energy bites (see recipe)
- Fruit and low-fat cottage cheese
- Chips and salsa
- Hard-boiled egg
- Smoothie
- Ranch dip with veggies
- Cherry tomato & mozzarella basil bites (see recipe)

<https://www.choosemyplate.gov/MyPlate>
<https://www.choosemyplate.gov/moms-pregnancy-breastfeeding>
<https://www.choosemyplate.gov/MyPlatePlan>
<https://www.womenshealth.gov/>
<https://whatscooking.fns.usda.gov/>

No-Bake Energy Bites

Yield: 24 Energy Bites



- 1 C rolled oats
- 1/2 C semi sweet chocolate chips
- 1/2 C ground flax seed
- 1/2 C crunchy peanut butter
- 1/3 C honey
- 1 t vanilla extract

Recipe adapted from AllRecipes.com

Combine oats, chocolate chips, flax seed, peanut butter, honey, and vanilla extract together in a bowl; form into balls using your hands. Arrange energy bites on a baking sheet and freeze until set, about 1 hour.

Per serving (1 energy bite): 94 calories, Total fat: 5.3 g, Saturated fat: 1.0 g, Sodium 28 mg, Carbohydrates: 10.6 g, Dietary Fiber: 1.9 g, Protein: 2.5 g

Cherry Tomato & Mozzarella Basil Bites

Yield: 2 Bites



- 5 Cherry Tomatoes
- 2 one-ounce fresh mozzarella cheese balls
- 1 T extra virgin olive oil
- Fresh basil leaves, shredded

Wash tomatoes, place tomatoes and cheese on a small plate. Drizzle with extra virgin olive oil. Top with shredded basil leaves for flavor.

Per serving (2 bites): 104 calories, Total fat: 7.3 g, Saturated fat: 3 g, Sodium 179 mg, Carbohydrates: 2.4 g, Dietary Fiber: 0.4 g, Protein: 7.2 g

Energy bites are also good for increasing fiber needed for bowel movements and milk production due to containing oats.

STEP 1



Hooklying Transversus Abdominis Palpation

REPS: 10 | DAILY: 2

Setup

Begin lying on your back with your legs bent and feet resting on the ground.

Movement

Place your fingers just inside the bones on the front of your pelvis. Exhale, and gently pull the muscles under your fingers in your lower belly in towards your spine. Relax and repeat.

Tip

Make sure to draw in rather than push out your muscles. This should be a subtle movement.

STEP 1



STEP 2



Bent Knee Fallouts

REPS: 10 | DAILY: 1

Setup

Begin lying on your back with your knees bent and feet resting on the floor.

Movement

Engage your abdominals by pulling belly button towards spine and slowly lower one knee towards the ground. Return to the starting position and repeat with the other leg.

Tip

Make sure to breathe and do not allow your hips or trunk to rotate during the exercise.

STEP 1



STEP 2



STEP 3



Supine March with Abdominals

REPS: 10 | DAILY: 1

Setup

Begin lying on your back with your knees bent and feet resting on the floor.

Movement

Engage your abdominals by pulling belly button towards spine and slowly raise one of your legs off the floor, keeping your knee bent. Hold briefly, then lower it back to the starting position and repeat with your other leg.

Tip

Make sure to keep your core engaged and do not let your low back arch during the exercise.

STEP 1



STEP 2



Clamshell

REPS: 10 | DAILY: 1

Setup

Begin lying on your side with your knees bent and your hips and shoulders stacked.

Movement

Engage your abdominals by pulling belly button towards spine and raise your top knee up toward the ceiling, then slowly return to the starting position and repeat.

Tip

Make sure to keep your core engaged and do not roll your hips forward or backward during the exercise.

STEP 1



STEP 2



Bridge

REPS: 10 | HOLD: 5 SEC | DAILY: 1

Setup

Begin lying on your back with both legs bent and your feet resting on the ground.

Movement

Take a deep breath in. As you exhale, tighten your abdominals and lift your hips off the ground into a bridge position. Exhale and lower your hips back to the ground, then repeat. Your body should be in a straight line at the top of the movement.

Tip

STEP 1



STEP 2



Quadruped Transversus Abdominis Bracing

REPS: 10 | HOLD: 3 SEC | DAILY: 2

Setup

Begin on all fours.

Movement

Gently release your abdominal muscles, letting your belly relax toward the floor. Then tighten your muscles, pulling your navel in and up towards your spine. Then relax and repeat.

Tip

Make sure not to hold your breath as you tighten your muscles and do not allow your back to arch or dip during exercise.