

The Postpartum Journey



Maternal Care after Birth

Pregnancy and the **postpartum** period offer a window into long-term health. It is important to monitor and address health issues early to prevent further serious challenges later in life. After giving birth, it is common for the focus to shift to your baby, but your postpartum health and well-being are as important as your baby's needs during this time when your body is healing and readjusting. Creating a postpartum care plan can help you prepare for medical appointments for both yourself and your baby, monitor progress toward healing, address mental health and wellness, adjust to motherhood, and identify support systems and resources. Planning ahead can improve the value and success of your postpartum care.

Experts recommend a first **postpartum** check-in within 3 weeks after birth and a detailed follow-up visit no later than 3 months after birth. Some delivery or postpartum challenges may require follow-up visits earlier than 3 weeks with additional close monitoring. For example, your provider might schedule an appointment with you as soon as 7-10 days after delivery to monitor blood pressure (due to risk or development of **preeclampsia**) or check incisions from a cesarian (also known as a C-section).

Postpartum care appointments can be used to talk about infant care, breastfeeding, addressing **complications** during delivery, managing chronic health conditions, and future family planning. Your newborn's pediatrician can also be a good resource for questions about breastfeeding, sleep, and other postpartum needs.

A *Postpartum Journey Worksheet* is provided in the **SWHR Journey to Motherhood: A Patient Empowerment Guide** for you to fill out and take with you when you visit your health care provider.



Postpartum care should be tailored to your unique needs.

If accessing care is challenging, ask your provider about the availability of home visits, phone or text support, home monitoring, or app-based care.

Assessing Postpartum Health

Women will experience physical, emotional, and relational changes as their body heals after a pregnancy. It is important to monitor specific health signs and changes during this time, especially if you had a pre-existing condition or were diagnosed with a new health condition during pregnancy.

In the unfortunate circumstance that a baby does not survive, **postpartum** care should still be done to ensure that you are healing after pregnancy – both physically and emotionally.

The general warning signs monitored during pregnancy should be continued after birth, with additional attention paid toward:

- Heavy bleeding
- Sudden pain or swelling
- Chest pain or extreme body pain
- Sudden weakness or tiredness
- Changes in your mood or feelings

Any urgent or persistent warning signs should be shared with your provider and evaluated immediately.

Visit the *Pregnancy Journey* section of the **SWHR Journey to Motherhood: A Patient Empowerment Guide** for more information about what changes to expect and warning signs to monitor during pregnancy.

Working through a Challenging Pregnancy Experience

Despite planning for an ideal pregnancy and birthing experience, challenges may arise, such as pregnancy-related illnesses, delivery **complications**, emergency surgeries, birth injuries, or miscarriage. These experiences can be painful and traumatic, sometimes resulting in feelings of helplessness, fear, guilt, or numbness. During such difficult times, nobody wants to feel or should be unsupported, attacked, or confused about what to do next.

In the unfortunate circumstance that a baby does not survive, it is important to address the grief and trauma concerning this loss. **Postpartum** care should still be done to ensure healing after pregnancy – both physically and emotionally.

Be encouraged to share your challenging experiences and feelings with a trusted provider

because these events can impact an individual's health well after pregnancy. It is also helpful to talk with your partner during the recovery period and engage with your community of support along the way. **Remember, you are not alone on your maternal health journey.**

Building a Postpartum Community of Support

Maintaining a network of support after delivery is essential and has been shown to improve health **postpartum**. Your postpartum support community may look different than during pregnancy.



Lactation Support and resources can be accessed at birthing facilities, community centers, and government programs like WIC (Women, Infants, and Children).



Home Visiting Programs may send a nurse or community health worker to your home to provide health care or motherhood support.



Meet-up Groups offer topic-specific support groups for postpartum concerns like breastfeeding, mental health, or safe sleeping. Some groups provide online meetings.



Faith-based Organizations and places of worship often offer community services, especially for mothers, children, and individuals with low incomes or in need of housing.



Mental Health Awareness after Pregnancy

Pregnancy and childbirth do not always go as planned, and the experience may bring up intense feelings that last after delivery. New moms can often feel overwhelmed by the physical and emotional demands of birth and adjusting to motherhood. Pregnant and new moms may cry, feel anxious, worry, get easily frustrated, lose their appetite, and not sleep well.

If certain symptoms continue or become more severe, it might be time to seek help. For example:

- Sadness, irritability, anxiety, tiredness, lack of concentration, and loss of interest
- Constant feelings of worry, nervousness, fear, and racing thoughts
- Repetitive, unwanted, and disruptive thoughts, and excessive urges to do certain actions
- Changes in behavior or recurrent reminders, resulting from a traumatic or upsetting experience during pregnancy, delivery, or **postpartum**
- Periods of extremely high and extremely low moods
- Extreme changes in mood and changes in one's sense of reality, including delusions, hallucinations, and paranoia

Mood disorders, such as depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar disorder, and psychosis can emerge or worsen during pregnancy or **postpartum**. Every woman should be screened for postpartum mood disorders, typically during that first postpartum care appointment (within 3 weeks after delivery).

- About **50-75%** of women experience
- **postpartum blues (or baby blues)** within
- **the first few weeks after birth.¹ These**
- **feelings, often mistaken for depression,**
- **will usually pass within 1-3 weeks after**
- **delivery. If symptoms do not pass**
- **or become more severe, it may be**
- **postpartum depression.**



If you are feeling overwhelmed and need immediate help, contact:



- National Maternal Mental Health Hotline: Call **1-833-852-6262 (TLC-MAMA)**
- Postpartum Support International: Call **1-800-944-4773 (4PPD)**
- National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: Call or text **9-8-8**
- For all other emergency care: Call **9-1-1**

¹ Carlson K, Mughal S, Azhar Y, et al. StatPearls. 2025:1-3.

MY POSTPARTUM JOURNEY WORKSHEET

Instructions: Use this form to record your postpartum experience and share with your health care provider on your next visit.

How are you feeling?

Experiencing the following physical symptoms are expected postpartum, however, if any are really bothersome, try to describe their location, severity, duration, and frequency, and then share them with your provider.

☐ Bleeding ☐ Swelling ☐ Pain ☐ Other: _____
☐ Discharge ☐ Breast tenderness ☐ Tiredness _____

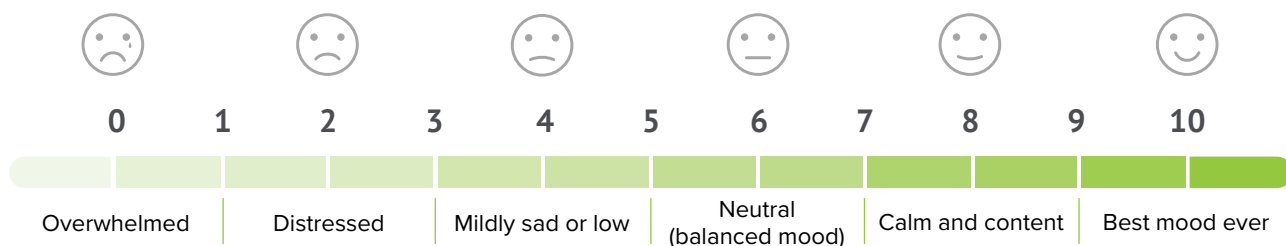
Using the mood scale below, indicate:

Additional emotions and comments:

Your primary mood during the last two weeks: _____

Your feelings about yourself and motherhood: _____

Your feelings about your baby: _____



My postpartum visits:

3-6 weeks after delivery

2-3 months after delivery

DD/MM/YY HH:MM am/pm DD/MM/YY HH:MM am/pm

Potential topics to discuss during your appointment: (Select your highest priority topics)

☐ Lactation and breastfeeding ☐ Sleep health or challenges
☐ Physical symptoms and changes ☐ Emotional and mental health
☐ Complications experienced during the pregnancy; potential longterm health implications ☐ Reproductive life plan (future pregnancies, contraception)
☐ Pre-eclampsia screening ☐ Intercourse and sexual health
☐ Diabetes screening ☐ Safety concerns or challenges

Postpartum Care Team

Name	Specialty	Contact Info	Last Visit

Notes: