



# Baby's home

**You are going home with your new bundle of joy! It is exciting, of course, but why do you feel a bit anxious?**

**M**ost mothers, especially first-time mums worry that they have to manage their baby's needs – diaper changes, baths, etc, on their own upon discharge. Do not worry. This is normal.

If you have to, get help from a family member or a confinement nanny. She can help to take care of both you and your baby for at least the first month. Give yourself time to adapt to living with your baby.

In general, here are what you may need to be prepared for:

## **Disrupted sleep**

Your baby's little tummy cannot hold much. That is why he cannot get through the night without waking up for milk. In the early days, this could be as often as every 2-3 hours. If you are breastfeeding through direct latching, seek help from your family members or your confinement lady to put your baby back to sleep after feeds so that you can get back to sleep.

**What to do**

- Rest as much as you can during the day.
- Nap when your baby naps.
- You may try latching your baby on to feed while lying down to get some rest.

**Post-delivery recovery**

While you are figuring out how to cope with your baby, these are some discomforts you may experience after childbirth:

- Lochia is a bloody discharge that begins immediately after delivery. The discharge will be quite heavy for the first two days but it will get lighter slowly.
- Afterpains or postpartum cramps is a mild ache that you may feel in your lower abdomen in the first few days after delivery. The pain is caused by the contraction of the uterus as it returns to its normal size before pregnancy. Breastfeeding mums will feel their uterus contracting as their baby suckles.
- An episiotomy is a cut made at the perineum (between the anus and the

vagina) during childbirth, which is stitched after delivery. Keep the area clean for the wound to heal faster. To prevent infection of the wound, change the sanitary pads regularly and wash the area each time you pass urine and motion.

- The caesarean wound is an operation cut at the lower abdomen to facilitate the delivery of the baby. A dressing will be placed on the area. Avoid lifting heavy objects during confinement to allow the wound to heal.

**What to do**

- Lochia, afterpains, and pain from the episiotomy and caesarean will go away after some time, so do not worry.
- However if you experience heavy bleeding, or you notice that there are clots, or that there is swelling and persistent pain from the episiotomy or caesarean wounds, see your doctor immediately.





### A new routine

With the arrival of your baby, you may have to make some adjustments to your usual routine. Caring for your baby will be a whole new experience for you, so be patient as you learn the ropes. Stay positive, learn to manage your expectations and cope with the changes.

#### What to do

- Start a new routine with your baby in mind. You will probably end up liking this a lot more than the old one!

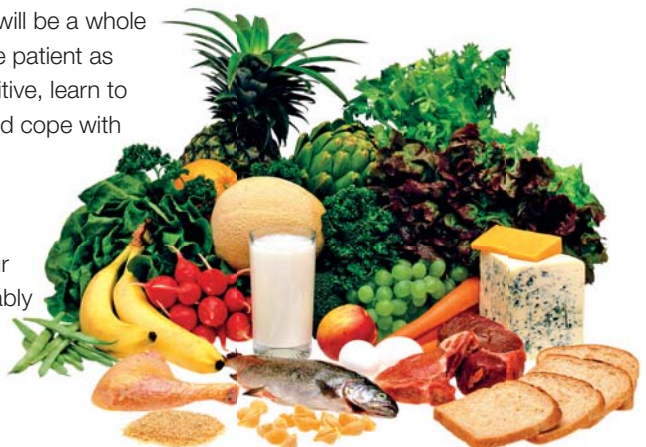
- Do not be afraid to ask for help if you need it. Family, friends and experts are aware of the demanding nature of caring for a baby and will be more than happy to offer advice and help.

### Changes to your body

After delivery, you may have to deal with hair loss, stretch marks or urinary incontinence. You may also find that your belly still looks bloated after giving birth. These are perfectly normal. Getting back in shape may take a few months.

#### What to do

- Accept that the changes to your body is part of the birthing experience.
- If you breastfeed, you are likely to get back in shape faster.
- Start a gentle exercise routine like walking to help you get back in shape.
- If you have hair loss, do not worry. The shedding process should stabilise within 6 - 12 months.
- Stretch marks on your tummy, thighs and breasts will not disappear, but they will fade after some time.
- Do pelvic floor exercises by squeezing the pectoral muscles as if you are trying to hold back urine.
- Eat a well-balanced diet. Avoid alcohol and tobacco products.





## Postnatal blues

If you are feeling easily irritable, tearful, anxious or frustrated, you may be having postnatal blues. Postnatal blues refer to a temporary period of emotional rejection and withdrawal that usually occurs in the first week after delivery and may not last more than two weeks. It is due to hormonal as well as physical and emotional changes that come from taking care of the newborn.

### What to do

- Establish open communication with family members especially when you are feeling low. Do not bottle up your feelings as suppressing them will only make you more moody and depressed.
- Complete tasks that need immediate attention. Let family members take over household chores so that you do not stress yourself out.
- A positive outlook in life is another key to handling postnatal blues. Do not compare yourself to other mothers.
- Recharge by doing things that relax you, like taking a stroll, or listening to music. Plan quiet time for yourself even if it is only for 15 minutes a day.
- Consider joining mothers' support groups to get to know other mums who are in a similar situation. You can exchange tips on caring for your baby as well as to alleviate stress.
- Eat well-balanced meals and add a little exercise to your routine. Stay tobacco-free and abstain from alcohol. Smoking and drinking will not help you cope with stress.

Symptoms of postnatal blues can last for a few hours, or days and usually fade away without the need for treatment. However, when postnatal blues last for more than two weeks, it can worsen to postnatal depression. Some of the tell-tale signs of the condition include:

- Feelings of self-blame.
- Withdrawal from family and friends.
- Thoughts of harming yourself or the baby.

If you suspect that you may be suffering from postnatal depression, speak with your doctor immediately. Refer to Page 113 for helplines.

## Ties with siblings

The baby's arrival might be unsettling for an older child in the family. You may have prepared him, but no amount of preparation can prevent him from feeling left out since he has been used to getting your attention especially if he has been the only child. He may display behavioural regression: behaving like a baby again, asking for a bottle when he is already drinking from cups, wetting himself even though he is already toilet-trained or throwing tantrums.





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#### What to do

- Find positive ways to involve your older child in the baby’s care and entertainment, like singing and reading to the baby, or trying to make him smile.
- Keep to your older child’s routines as far as possible, so he does not feel that his life is in a major upheaval because of the baby.
- Make it a point to spend quality time with him every day.
- Be loving and patient with him.

## Confinement

“Confinement” is an Asian concept observed after birth by the Chinese (30 days), Malays (44 days) and Indians (40 days) here in Singapore. Here are some common myths:

**Myth:** Food must be cooked with sesame oil, herbs and ginger to drive “wind” out from the body.

**Fact:** It is important to eat everything in moderation.

**Myth:** A meat and liver-only diet will replenish blood.

**Fact:** Just having meat and liver will not allow you to meet all your nutritional needs, especially for breastfeeding mothers. Meat and liver also contain fats and cholesterol and should be consumed moderately. A well-balanced diet should consist of food from the 4 food groups, i.e. rice and alternatives, meat and alternatives, fruit and vegetables.



**Myth:** Drinking alcohol keeps the body warm and improves blood circulation.

**Fact:** Alcohol may be transmitted through breast milk to your baby. It also prevents oxytocin release and reduces the production of breast milk. There are also adverse effects on the baby’s growth and development. Avoid alcohol totally during confinement, and if you are breastfeeding.

**Myth:** Liver and spinach soup, black chicken and wine increase milk production.

**Fact:** There is no proven benefit that these will increase milk supply. The best way to increase milk supply is to latch your baby on as often as required and to express milk regularly.