Pregnancy, Vaginal Delivery, Discharge Information

What is a vaginal delivery?

A vaginal delivery is childbirth that happens when the baby is pushed down the birth canal and delivered through the vagina. Every labor and delivery is different. How long labor and delivery lasts and how it progresses varies depending on previous births, the position of the baby’s head, and the size of the baby and the birth canal. There are, however, general stages of labor and delivery that a healthcare provider uses to decide whether it is progressing normally for a vaginal delivery. The 3 stages of labor are:

- First stage: The cervix opens and thins to full dilation. The average woman in her first labor may dilate about 1 cm per hour during the active phase of labor. If you have had a baby before, the cervix usually dilates faster.
- Second stage: The baby moves through the birth canal and is born. This stage of labor usually lasts 15 to 75 minutes but may last as long as 2 or 3 hours.
- Third stage: The placenta (afterbirth) passes through the birth canal and is delivered. This usually happens within 30 minutes after the birth of the baby.

How can I take care of myself when I go home?

Postpartum is the time after the birth of your baby when your body is changing back to normal. It lasts about 6 weeks or until your uterus returns to its normal size. If you are not breast-feeding, you may start having menstrual periods 3 to 10 weeks after delivery. If you are breast-feeding, you may not get your period again until you stop breast-feeding. During this time, you will need to take steps to adjust to your body’s changes and life with a new baby.

Management

- Your provider will give you a list of your medicines when you leave the hospital.
  o Know your medicines. Know what they look like, how much should take each time, how often you are to take them, and why you take each one.
  o Take your medicines exactly as your provider tells you to.
- Your provider may prescribe medicine to:
  o Treat pain
  o Treat or prevent an infection
  o Soften stool and reduce straining with a bowel movement
  o Reduce swelling in the area of your rectum
• To relieve the pain in the vaginal area and keep the area clean you can sit in a warm bath, put cold packs on the area, or put warm water on the area with a squirt bottle or sponge.

• To relieve tension headaches that many women develop in the first few weeks after delivering their baby, lie down with a cool damp cloth on your forehead or try relaxation techniques, such as meditation.

• To relieve breast pain and discomfort after your milk comes in (2 to 4 days after childbirth):
  o Wear a well-fitting support bra
  o If you are breastfeeding, maintain a regular breastfeeding schedule
  o If you are not breast-feeding, put ice packs on your breasts and do not stimulate your nipples

Appointments
• Follow your provider's instructions for follow-up appointments for you and the baby.
• Keep appointments for any routine testing you or the baby may need.
• Talk with your provider about any questions or fears you have.

Diet, Exercise, and Other Lifestyle Changes
• Follow the treatment plan your healthcare provider prescribes.
• Follow activity restrictions, such as not driving or operating machinery, as recommended by your healthcare provider or pharmacist, especially if you are taking pain medicines.
• If you had a normal delivery without any problems, you can get back to doing most of your normal activities right away.
  o Do not do any heavy lifting or otherwise strain the belly muscles for 4 to 6 weeks.
  o Exercise as your provider recommends.
• Get plenty of rest while you're recovering. Try to get at least 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night. You may find it helpful to try to sleep while the baby sleeps.
• Drink enough fluids to keep your urine light yellow in color, unless you are told to limit fluids.
• Eat a healthy diet.
  o Avoid diets which cause you to lose weight very quickly.
  o Eat foods rich in fiber to prevent constipation.
  o Eat meals on a regular basis.
  o Avoid drinks that contain a large amount of caffeine
  o If you are breast-feeding, eat at least 1800 calories a day.
• To help prevent bladder infections:
Practice good hygiene and wipe from front to back after urination and bowel movements.

Urinate regularly and avoid long waits between the times you empty your bladder.

- Talk to your provider about methods of birth control you can use after the birth of your baby. You may still be able to get pregnant even if you do not have a period.
- Do not put anything in the vagina, including tampons, or have sex until your provider says it is okay.

**Call emergency medical services or 911 if you have new or worsening:**

- Severe vaginal bleeding (soaking a pad every hour for more than 2 hours) with:
  - Weakness
  - Fainting
  - Dizziness
- Have a severe headache with:
  - Changes in your eyesight such as difficulty focusing or blurred vision
  - Nausea
  - Vomiting
  - Weakness in any part of your body
- Feel like you want to hurt yourself or the baby.

If you have any of these symptoms, do not drive yourself

**Call your healthcare provider if you have new or worsening:**

- Chest pain
- Abdominal pain
- Shortness of breath
- Blood clots the size of a plum or larger with vaginal bleeding
- Vaginal discharge with a bad odor or itching
- Depressed, sad, anxious, afraid, or confused feelings for more than 2 to 3 days
- Swelling, redness or pain in your breasts
- Unusual discharge from the nipples
- Trouble emptying your bladder
- Pain or burning with urination
- Swelling, redness, or pain in your legs
• Change in bowel habits, such as pain, mucus, diarrhea, constipation, or other intestinal problems
• Signs of infection around your surgical wound. These include:
  o The area around the wound is more red or painful.
  o The wound area is very warm to touch.
  o You have blood, pus, or other fluid coming from the wound area.
  o Fever higher than 101.5° F (38.6° C).
  o You have chills or muscle aches.