

Factors that Influence Postpartum Recovery

Time Period	Factors that Enhance Recovery	Factors that Inhibit or Prolong Recovery
Pre-pregnancy	Excellent physical health and fitness, Good mental health Family support Financial well-being Positive experiences relating to health care or reproduction Experience caring for newborns	Poor health and fitness Personal or family history of mental illness, Dysfunctional family of origin or lack of family support Financial worries Previous negative experiences with health care providers or with reproduction
Pregnancy	Good self-care Health maintenance Freedom from pregnancy complications Thriving healthy fetus Good relationship with doctor	Unhealthy or stressful pregnancy, complications or poor self-care, Fetus not thriving, or in questionable health, Little contact or poor relationship with doctor
Birth	Freedom from complications Continuity in care from staff Labor of normal length Minimal interventions Normal vaginal birth Healthy, term newborn Immediate, prolonged contact with and feeding of newborn	Fetal complications Lack of continuity in care Fear of labor, staff, procedures Prolonged labor requiring heavy use of pain or other medications and procedures Cesarean birth Baby admitted to the NICU Breastfeeding difficulties Early separation of newborn from mother
First Days	Adequate rest for mother and partner Adequate help, nourishment, and support for mother and partner Good healing of any incisions, Milk comes in and baby nurses well Mellow, responsive baby Consistent advice from staff regarding self-care, infant care and feeding	Exhaustion in mother/partner; inability to sleep, lack of help, isolation, loneliness, Fussy, needy baby; poor feeder Infection, illness in mother, poor incision healing, Maternal pain (perineum, incision, breasts, other), Newborn problems, Delay in milk production or excessive engorgement Contradictory advice from staff members.

Postpartum recovery is a complex process that is influenced by many factors and processes. When the latter occur smoothly and harmoniously, recovery is optimal and will be completed in 4 to 8 weeks. There are many basic survival tools and tactics that will aid in a speedy recovery. Sleep whenever you can. Eat three good meals a day have nutritious snacks on hand - this is especially important for breastfeeding mothers. Drink a lot of fluids. Take a bath or shower daily. Take a walk or get some sort of physical activity each day. Ask for help when you need it. Don't expect others to know when and how to help. Develop support systems. Set realistic expectations of what you can and cannot do in a day. Remember that caring for an infant can be time consuming (feeding, changing, burping, holding). It can be helpful to plan one activity or outing each day, but be flexible.

Expect to be tired. Nap frequently to make up for lost sleep. Anticipate and work on communication problems. Find ways to give you and your partner positive feedback. Find support in local moms groups. If you have postpartum depression, join a support group and see a counselor. Get help early!

Expect to have feelings about the labor, the birth, toward the baby, about nursing or not, about responsibility, about your partner. Remember feelings are feelings. They are not logical, rational, right or wrong. Allow yourself to feel them and find someone safe to talk to about them. Up to 80% of women experience the "baby blues", a mood change which can occur 24-48 hours postpartum. It is believed that this mood swing is related to the rapid hormonal changes of labor and childbirth. Symptoms can include crying easily (often or for no apparent reason), irritability, fatigue, difficulty sleeping, and sometimes anxiety or worry. Usually these symptoms are gone in 2 weeks, but sometimes they last longer. Most families experience a normal period of adjustment to the new demands as needs change to accommodate the new baby.

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