

## WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT IN PHYSICAL CHANGES AFTER THE DELIVERY?

**Discharge** - It begins as heavy bright red bleeding following delivery, but gradually decreases. Within a few days, it becomes a brownish discharge. Before the six-week checkup it should become a thin mucous discharge and then stop completely. If it should change back into a bright red bleeding after a week or so, notify your doctor.

**Muscles in the abdomen** - It takes several months for the muscles to get back into shape. Use abdominal exercises after your six-week checkup. Before that, you can tighten the muscles, relax, tighten, relax . . . to help firm up again. The uterus will contract down into the pelvic bone structure in about 10 days, but it will take much longer to get your abdomen and waist back to normal.

**Menstrual periods** - If you are breastfeeding, you will probably begin your periods in about 6-8 weeks. Sometimes, however, they do not return for the entire time you breastfeed. They may also be irregular until you stop breastfeeding. Because of the uncertainty, you should use a reliable form of birth control while breastfeeding to prevent conception.

**Stitches** - Most women have at least a few. Sitting in warm water several times a day can help, so can a heat lamp on that area. You can use a lamp without a shade if you don't have access to a heat lamp (do not use an ultraviolet lamp!). The doctor can prescribe a stool softener to help prevent further discomfort on the stitched area.

**Abdominal discomforts** - The uterus is trying to get back into shape after delivery, and cramps at first. It is also felt strongly when the baby nurses. Nursing helps the uterus contract back to pre-pregnant size by releasing a hormone. If you take pain medication recommended by the doctor about 30 minutes before you breastfeed, this will help your discomfort. These after-cramps usually subside by the third or fourth day after delivery. By then, an over-the-counter pain reliever (ibuprofen or acetaminophen) is usually sufficient to relieve the discomfort.

### **NOTIFY YOUR DOCTOR IF YOU EXPERIENCE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING:**

- heavy, bright red bleeding
- an odor from the vaginal discharge
- redness around a vein in your leg
- pain in your legs when standing
- swollen area or lump in your breasts
- redness or tenderness in just one spot in your breast
- cracked or bleeding nipples
- fever (temperature > 100.0 degrees) after your first day post-partum