

Decreasing Your Breast Milk Production:

Following the death of your baby, particularly if you have been breastfeeding or pumping, your body will produce milk. If you follow a plan that limits the amount of breast stimulation you receive, your body will know quickly that it does not need to produce milk. The following suggestions are designed to help you reduce your physical discomfort and reduce or stop milk production.

If Your Milk Production has Not (or Only Recently) Increased:

Do not express any milk from your breasts; the pressure of too much milk inside the milk ducts causes milk production to stop. If you decrease that pressure by expressing milk, the breasts will make more milk. This pressure and the accompanying lumpy feel of milk and tissue swelling may be uncomfortable for three to four days for most women and as long as ten days for some. Although you may or may not continue to have some milk after this time, your breasts will not feel as painful, and your body will gradually reabsorb the milk. You may occasionally notice a few drops of milk for up to several months after stopping.

If You Have Been Using a Breast Pump for Several Weeks:

Stopping the pumping abruptly may make your breasts too uncomfortable. Adjust your schedule so that over time, you pump less and less. For example, if you have been pumping six times a day, drop to five times a day for two days, then to four times, continuing until you are no longer pumping.

Comfort Measures to Decrease Your Milk Supply:

- Apply ice packs for 15 to 20 minutes, three to four times a day and up to hourly for comfort and to reduce swelling.
- A supportive well-fitted bra should be worn. Binding, or wrapping breasts tightly is not recommended and can cause breast infections. Nursing pads can be worn inside the bra if the breasts leak milk. Leaking is normal.
- Cabbage leaf compress will decrease your milk production. Wash cold, raw cabbage leaves thoroughly and place them inside your bra. Replace the wilted cabbage leaves several times a day. The cabbage can be cold or at room temperature.
- Over the counter medications such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen may be taken as needed.
- When showering, stand with your back to the water flow and avoid heat on your breasts.
- Do not reduce your fluid intake – it will not reduce your milk supply and can make you dehydrated.

If you have breast milk stored at the hospital or at home and would like to donate it in memory of your baby, contact the Mothers Milk Bank Austin at 512.494.0800. A representative will help you make the necessary arrangements. If you have any other questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to call CHRISTUS Children's at 210.704.4787.

Activity

In the first few days at home, get lots of rest and take care of yourself. Caring for your body during the grieving process is important for healing. Try to maintain consistent rest patterns and avoid increased work. The return to normal activity should be gradual, leaving non-essential things until you are feeling stronger. Ask your health care provider when you can resume driving.

Bladder

A full bladder may keep your uterus from contracting properly, thereby increasing bleeding. Urinate often, particularly on the first day home. If you have difficulty, try pouring warm water over the perineum (the part of your body between your genitals and your anus) or urinating in the shower. If you have stitches, the water will relieve the burning caused by urine running over the stitches.

Bleeding

You may experience a period-like flow of bleeding which may be relatively heavy and red on your first day home and may continue to be red for two to four days. After that, the flow becomes brown or pink and may decrease in amount each day and stop around the tenth day. A slight white or yellow discharge may be noticeable for several days afterward. A persistent red flow or sudden gush may be a warning sign that you are doing too much. If you have been lying down for a while, you may experience a heavy release of flow when you change your position to standing or sitting.

If a heavy flow persists, you are constantly saturating pads, you notice a foul odor or have a fever over 100°F contact your health care provider.

Bowels

You should be able to move your bowels in a day or two. Drink plenty of fluids, especially water and juices. Prune juice is a natural laxative and may be taken to prevent constipation. After a cesarean, abdominal distention and gas may cause you some discomfort. Walking around and using a hot water bottle can help alleviate these discomforts.

Breasts

You may experience changes to your breasts during the first few days at home. These changes are absolutely normal and will pass in the next few days. Breast swelling (engorgement) is very common and can be uncomfortable. You may notice that your breasts are leaking a clear sticky substance; this is perfectly normal. Try not to stimulate your breasts; the swelling, tenderness and leaking will stop after a few days. Contact your health care provider if you have any concerns.

Cramping

Some cramping is normal as you return home. Severe or persistent cramping in the first 24 hours may indicate that clots have accumulated inside your uterus; this is not uncommon, and you may pass a few small clots at home. A hot water bottle or heating pad on your abdomen can help ease the discomfort. Cramping will gradually decrease intensity but can last seven to ten days. Your health care provider may prescribe you pain medications to help relieve the cramping. Contact your health care provider if cramping is severe or if you are passing large clots.

Menstruation

It usually takes four to eight weeks for periods to resume. Ovulation returns before menstruation begins, so you could become pregnant even if you have not had a period. Usually, conception is not recommended until at least two cycles have passed since you have returned home. Any plans for conception and contraception should be discussed with your health care provider.

Nutrition and Weight Loss

As you are trying to cope with your feelings of loss, you may not feel like eating very much or alternatively, you may be eating too much. It is important to maintain a healthy diet so that you will have the physical and emotional energy you need to heal. Try to drink eight glasses of water every day and follow the traditional food pyramid of grains, vegetables, fruits, oils, milk, meats, and beans to get the nutrition your body needs to recover. Try to avoid caffeine and alcohol. Also, this is not the right time to begin a diet. Any weight reduction you experience should be gradual. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about nutrition or weight loss.

Perineum Care

After coming home from the hospital, your perineum (the part of your body between your genitals and your anus) may need some extra care to heal. Every time you change your pad or go to the bathroom, do the following: a) wipe yourself from the front to the back to avoid bringing bacteria from the rectal area forward to the perineum, and b) squirt warm water from a peri bottle over the vaginal opening. This care promotes cleanliness in the perineum, soothes tissue discomfort and helps prevent infection.

Postpartum Depression

Every woman reacts to the death of her baby in a unique way. While your body recovers physically, most women will experience emotional distress. Intense feelings of sadness, depression, exhaustion, fatigue, confusion, loneliness, disappointment, anger and fear are all common during this time, or you may feel numb. Some of what you are feeling may be related in part to the enormous hormonal changes that occur during your first few days at home as well as fatigue, lack of sleep and or physical discomfort.

It is estimated that 10-20 percent of woman experience postpartum depression. This can be more worrisome after a pregnancy loss because you are not only dealing with normal hormonal and physical changes, but you are also dealing with the death of your baby as well. Women with postpartum depression often have feelings of irritability, anxiety, inadequacy or hopelessness and may feel anger towards their partner. You may be unable to cope with day-to-day activities or have physical symptoms such as headaches, chest pain, rapid heart rate, inability to sleep and loss of appetite, or perhaps you may overeat. Like some women, you may not want to be with people or fear being alone, have nightmares or scary thoughts, feel as though you were in a deep dark pit or feel like you are “going crazy”. Grief includes feelings of depression. If the feelings of depression are severe (sleep disturbance, appetite changes, lingering irritability/ anger, chronic hopelessness, persistent anxiety/panic, social withdrawal) last longer than a week, increase in intensity or begin to interfere with your ability to function at home or at work, it is important that you contact your health care provider.

Sexual Relations

Many health care providers recommend that after labor and delivery, nothing should go into the vagina for six weeks, which would require sexual abstinence as well as refraining from the use of tampons or douches. This six-week time period is usually suggested to allow all bleeding to stop and for stitches to heal. It is not usual to have a decreased sex drive during this time. Reduced vaginal lubrication can be eased by the use of a water-based lubricant. Never use Vaseline as a lubricant for intercourse. Check with your health care provider for more information about resuming sexual relations.

Stitches

Any stitches you may have received are self-dissolving and no removal is necessary. Most of them are internal so you will not be able to see them. Applying ice to the vaginal area is often recommended in the first 24 hours to decrease swelling. Warm soaks in a clean tub are soothing to promote healing. Be sure to ask your health care provider when tub baths are permitted.

Your health care provider may prescribe perineal pads or a spray to soothe any vaginal or rectal discomfort. Witch hazel spray compressions may also be applied for relief. If you had a cesarean birth and notice any drainage, swelling or separation at the edges of the incision line, report this to your health care provider.

Uterus

The uterus can sometimes feels like a hard ball located midway between your belly button (umbilicus) and your pubic bone. Each day it will become smaller until it can no longer be felt by around the tenth day. It may take approximately six weeks for the uterus to return to its normal size.

The uterus should be firm, with moderate bleeding expected. Gentle massage in a circular motion over the uterus should be performed if the uterus is not firm or if bleeding is excessive, massage causes the uterus to become firm and assists in controlling bleeding. If the top part of the uterus (fundus) is very high or off to one side, you may have a full bladder, which can interfere with effective massage.

Contact your health care provider if you have any of these symptoms:

- Heavy bleeding, enough to soak through a large maxi pad in an hour or less
- Fever greater than 100°F
- Sudden onset of severe pain in your incision, perineum or abdomen
- Pass a clot larger than a lemon followed by heavy bleeding
- Difficulty urinating or experiencing pain, burning or urgency while urinating
- Foul-smelling vaginal discharge
- Your cesarean incision opens, smells foul, or bleeds
- Swollen, red, painful area on your leg (especially in the calf) that is hot to the touch
- Tender, red, warm swollen area on your breast, especially with fever or flu-like symptoms
- Shooting pain down your legs or difficulty walking
- Severe headache especially when sitting or standing, that is relieved when you lie down

Contact your health care provider if you have any questions or concerns after delivery.