

# Mother and New Baby Health Guide

**NYC**  
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## **Congratulations on your new baby!** **Thank you for trusting NYC Health + Hospitals with your care.**

The first few weeks with a new baby are precious, but they can also be overwhelming. All at once, your body is recovering from childbirth, you may feel nervous, exhausted and sleep-deprived, and you are learning how to care for your newborn baby. It will take time to adjust.

At NYC Health + Hospitals, we are here to support you and your growing family. This guide will help you manage the early days after childbirth with some of the most commonly asked questions from new parents. Always feel free to reach out to your care team if you need additional support.

Available online and in other languages at:  
[nychealthandhospitals.org/BabyGuide](https://nychealthandhospitals.org/BabyGuide)

# Care for Moms After Childbirth

Having a baby is a major event for you and your baby. Your body has gone through major changes and it will take some time to get back to “normal.” Even if you have had a child before, things will change with the new baby.

## Rest and Activity

- + Your body will take about 6 to 8 weeks to heal. During this time, your uterus will slowly decrease to its normal size. You may feel cramps during the first few days. Mild to moderate cramps help the uterus shrink.
- + Rest as much as possible. Try to nap when your baby is sleeping.
- + Do not lift anything heavier than your baby for at least two weeks.
- + Avoid any activities that make you breathe hard or strain your muscles.
- + Ask your doctor or midwife when it is safe to return to work or physical activity.

## Body Care and Hygiene

- + Wash your hands frequently, especially after changing your baby’s diapers or going to the bathroom.
- + During the first two weeks, take showers only – no baths. Your doctor will let you know when you can go back to taking baths.
- + If you are breastfeeding, avoid using soap on your nipples as it can dry out your skin.



## Bleeding, and Vaginal and Perineal Care

- + After child birth (vaginal delivery or c-section), it is common to have:
  - Vaginal bleeding for up to 6 weeks.
  - Soreness in your vagina and perineum (the area between your vagina and anus)
  - Pelvic cramps
- + Your vaginal bleeding will begin as a heavy, bright red flow in the first 24 hours after delivery. It will change to lighter, reddish-brown flow two or three days postpartum. The color will then turn pink, then tan then yellow and finally clear.
- + Do not use tampons or douches until your health care provider says it is safe. Instead, use pads.

### ► CONTACT A HEALTH CARE PROVIDER IF YOU HAVE:

- + A fever.
- + A rash.
- + Trouble breathing or shortness of breath.
- + Foul-smelling vaginal bleeding or discharge
- + So much blood from your vagina that you fill two sanitary pads in an hour.
- + Large blood clots from your vagina (the size of a golf ball).
- + Difficulty urinating, pain when urinating, or you are urinating more than usual.
- + A sudden increase or decrease in frequency of bowel movements (poop).
- + A vaginal tear that has signs of an infection (redness, swelling, pain, fluid or blood, warmth, pus, or a bad smell).
- + A vaginal tear that is not healing.
- + A red or swollen leg that is painful or warm to the touch
- + No menstrual period for 12 weeks after delivery (and you have no history of breastfeeding and are not on hormonal birth control).
- + No menstrual period for 12 weeks after you stopped breastfeeding (and you are not on hormonal birth control).



## Breast Care

- + Apply cold packs to the breasts and under the arms to help with swelling.
- + Wear a well-fitting, supportive bra at all times.

### ► CONTACT A HEALTH CARE PROVIDER IF YOU HAVE:

- + Redness, severe pain or a lump in either breast

## Incision Care After a C-Section

- + After a C-section, it is common to have a small amount of blood or clear fluid coming from the incision.
- + Wash your hands for 20 seconds before and after changing your bandages.

### ► CONTACT A HEALTH CARE PROVIDER IF:

- + Your c-section incision has signs of an infection (redness, swelling, pain, fluid or blood, warmth, pus, or a bad smell).

## Healthy Eating and Lifestyle

- + Drink at least 8 glasses of water every day.
- + Eat high fiber foods every day, such as beans, brown rice, whole grain bread and cereal, and fruits and vegetables. High fiber foods may prevent or relieve constipation.
- + Do not drink alcohol. This is especially important if you are breastfeeding or taking medication to relieve pain.
- + Do not smoke, vape, or use any products with nicotine or tobacco.



## Sex

- + Avoid sex for 6 weeks so your body can heal.
- + If you are not using birth control, it is possible to get pregnant very soon after having a baby, even if you have not had your period.
- + If you don't want to get pregnant right away, talk to your doctor about the best form of birth control for you.
- + Planning on having another child? Consider waiting at least 18 months before your next pregnancy to reduce the risk of poor health outcomes for you and your child.

## Postpartum Preeclampsia

Postpartum preeclampsia is a serious condition related to high blood pressure that can happen up to six weeks after giving birth.

### ► **CALL 911 IF YOU HAVE ONE OF THE WARNING SIGNS:**

- + Trouble breathing or shortness of breath
- + Chest pain
- + Seizures or symptoms of a stroke
- + Seeing spots or other vision changes
- + Blood pressure reading higher than 140/90
- + Feeling nauseous or throwing up
- + Swelling in your hands and face
- + Severe headaches
- + Severe stomach pain

### ► **DO NOT WAIT TO SEE IF SYMPTOMS WILL GO AWAY.**

### ► **DO NOT DRIVE YOURSELF TO THE HOSPITAL.**



## Medical Appointments After Childbirth

Depending on circumstances, moms may expect the following medical appointments after childbirth:

- + **Within 3 days:** A health visit with a clinician (may be a telehealth visit). This is especially important for patients with high blood pressure or any complications during the birthing process.
- + **Within 2 weeks:** If you have had a cesarean delivery, visit with a clinician to check your wound.
- + **Within 2-8 weeks:** A standard postpartum visit with a clinician (may be a telehealth visit).

Taking care of yourself after delivery is about more than just postpartum care. If you have chronic conditions, such as diabetes or hypertension, it is important to also see your primary care doctor. You can call to make an appointment today at **1-844-NYC-4NYC** or schedule online at through your MyChart account.

## Taking Care of Your Feelings After Childbirth

### The Baby Blues

It's common to feel sad, stressed, or have mood swings after having a baby. This is called the Baby Blues. It happens to 60-80% of people after giving birth and usually goes away within two weeks.

### Postpartum Depression

Postpartum depression lasts longer than Baby Blues and feels stronger. You may have postpartum depression if you are experiencing the following symptoms:

- + Crying more often than usual
- + Change in appetite
- + Inability to sleep or sleeping too much
- + Feelings of anger
- + Withdrawing from loved ones
- + Feeling numb or disconnected from your baby



- + Worrying that you will hurt the baby
- + Difficulty sleeping even when your baby is sleeping

If you have postpartum depression, help is available.

- + Don't face postpartum depression alone. Contact your doctor and get professional help. Talk therapy, and maybe medication, will help you get back to your former self.
- + Talk openly about your feelings with your partner, other mothers, friends, and family.
- + Join a support group for mothers.
- + Find a relative or close friend who can help you take care of the baby.
- + As soon as your doctor or other primary health care provider says it's okay, take walks and get exercise.
- + Try not to worry about unimportant tasks—be realistic about what you can really do while taking care of a new baby.

Need help now?

- + To talk to a doctor now by phone or video, go to [expresscare.nyc](https://www.expresscare.nyc) or call 631-397-2273.
- + Call, text, or chat 988 to access the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, which connects you to trained crisis counselors 24/7. They can help anyone thinking about suicide, struggling with substance use, experiencing a mental health crisis, or any other kind of emotional distress. You can also contact them if you are worried about someone who may need crisis support.

► **CALL 911 OR GO TO AN EMERGENCY ROOM IF:**

- + You are having thoughts of hurting yourself or your baby
- + You are extremely confused.
- + You hear or see things others do not.





# Caring for Your Baby

## Breastfeeding

- + Your baby's stomach is the size of a marble. How often you feed your baby will vary, but it's usually every few hours for newborns.
- + Babies know how much breastmilk they need to take in. They usually end the feeding themselves by letting go of the breast or releasing the nipple when they fall asleep.
- + A nursing pillow can support the baby's weight and create a more comfortable position for you.
- + Eating a well-balanced diet and drinking plenty of water will help you produce breastmilk.
- + Warm water is all that is needed to clean your nipples. Try to reduce the amount of soap, shampoo, and other cleansers that might irritate the area.

## Need help?

- At the hospital, our nurses and lactation consultants can coach you on positioning your baby and ensuring you achieve proper latching.
- Ask your care team about our breastfeeding classes available in person, online, one-on-one, and in group settings.
- If you are unable to breastfeed or you need additional breastfeeding support, contact your provider.



## Storing your Breastmilk

Storage Locations and Temperatures

Type of Breast Milk	Countertop	Refrigerator	Freezer
Freshly Expressed or Pumped	Up to <b>4 hours</b>	Up to <b>4 days</b>	Within <b>6 months</b>
Thawed, Previously Frozen	<b>1-2 hours</b>	Up to <b>24 hours</b>	<b>Never</b> refreeze breastmilk after it has been thawed
Leftover from a Feeding (baby did not finish the bottle)	Use within <b>2 hours</b> after the baby is finished feeding		

## Safe Sleep

Sharing a bed with your baby is not safe and increases a baby's risk of injury or death. Your baby only needs a few things to have a safe, cozy sleep:

- + Babies should always be placed on their back to sleep.
- + Babies should sleep on a firm surface that does not incline.
- + Keep soft objects such as pillows, blankets, crib bumpers, and toys out of your baby's sleep area.
- + For the first six months, babies should sleep either in your bedroom or close enough so that you can hear them during the night.
- + Do not fall asleep with baby on your chest or sleep on couches, recliners, or rockers with your baby.



## Bathing Your Baby

- + Always keep one hand on the baby.
- + Bathe your baby with a sponge until the umbilical cord falls off and heals.
- + Most babies only need a bath 2 or 3 times a week.

## Taking Your Baby's Temperature

If you think your baby may be sick, check his/her temperature. Ear thermometers should not be used in the first year of life.

- + Place a digital thermometer in the center of the baby's armpit, and hold for at least 3 minutes or until the digital thermometer beeps.
- + A normal temperature is between 97.7 and 99.6° F.
  - If your baby's temperature is below 97.7° F, hold your baby close to you (skin to skin) for 30 minutes. If the baby's temperature is still low, call your pediatrician.
  - If your baby's temperature is 100.4° F or higher, call your pediatrician.

## Umbilical Cord Care

- + A baby's umbilical cord stump needs to dry up before it falls off, which is usually 1 to 3 weeks after birth.
- + Keep the front of your baby's diaper folded down, so it doesn't cover the stump.
- + Let the stump fall off on its own. Do not pull off the stump yourself.

## Diaper Rash

- + Diaper rash usually clears up with simple at-home care, such as air drying, more-frequent diaper changes, and using a zinc oxide cream or ointment.
- + If the rash hasn't improved after a few days, call your pediatrician. You may need prescription medication to treat the rash.



## Meet with a HealthySteps Specialist, a Baby and Toddler Expert

Have questions about your newborn or parenting? NYC Health + Hospitals' pediatric primary care departments offer baby and toddler experts who can help you navigate challenges with your baby or toddler, including:

- + Crying
- + Sleeping
- + Adjusting to new routines
- + Family relationships
- + Parent coaching
- + Picky eating
- + Tantrums
- + Early literacy programs

Ask your newborn's pediatric primary care doctor to speak with a HealthySteps Specialist to get connected.

## Food, Financial Assistance, and Other Resources

There are many resources available to you for free or low cost: food, diapers, financial assistance, legal assistance, and so much more. Resources include:

### Food

- + **Food pantries** give out free groceries to use at home. Go to [www.FindHelp.NYCHHealthAndHospitals.org](http://www.FindHelp.NYCHHealthAndHospitals.org) to find food pantries near you.
- + **Soup kitchens** serve meals at community centers at no cost. Go to [www.FindHelp.NYCHHealthAndHospitals.org](http://www.FindHelp.NYCHHealthAndHospitals.org) to find soup kitchens near you.
- + **Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP)** provides money to buy groceries for families that meet the eligibility criteria. Call 311 to find a SNAP Center near you.



- + **Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)** provides money to buy groceries (including formula), nutrition counseling, and breastfeeding support to families with children up to age 5. WIC sites are available at several NYC Health + Hospitals locations. Ask your care team for a referral.

## Financial Assistance

- + **NYC Free Tax Prep** helps individuals file their taxes for free in person or online and is available for New Yorkers who meet the income criteria. During tax season (January-April), our hospitals offer free tax prep as part of the citywide effort. Visit [nyc.gov/TaxPrep](https://nyc.gov/TaxPrep) to learn more.
- + **Financial Empowerment Centers** provide free one-on-one financial counseling and coaching services to help you reach your financial goals, including how to manage your money, establish or improve your credit, open a safe and affordable bank account, develop a strategy to reduce debt or lower payments, and more. Visit [nyc.gov/TalkMoney](https://nyc.gov/TalkMoney) to learn more.

## Baby Supplies

- + **Diaper banks** offer free diapers and other essential items for mother and baby. Go to [www.FindHelp.NYHealthAndHospitals.org](https://www.FindHelp.NYHealthAndHospitals.org) to find diaper banks near you.

## Housing

- + **Shelters**  
NYC offers separate shelters for families with children. The family intake shelter is open 24/7 and is located at 151 East 151st Street, Bronx, NY.
- + **Affordable housing**  
Apply online at NYC Housing Connect.
- + **Supportive housing**  
Supportive housing is available for people experiencing homelessness who have a mental health or substance use diagnosis. Our Housing for Health team can help eligible patients apply for supportive housing. Ask your care team for a referral.



## Legal Assistance

- + **Free legal services** are available at our hospitals in partnership with LegalHealth, a division of the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG). Ask your care team for a referral.

## Domestic Violence

- + **Hotline:** Help is available for survivors of domestic and gender-based violence. To get connected to services, call NYC's 24-hour HOPE Hotline at 1-800-621-HOPE (4673), TTY: 866-604-5350, or chat with an advocate at [on.nyc.gov/HotlineChat](https://on.nyc.gov/HotlineChat).
- + **Family Justice Centers** offer free and confidential assistance for people experiencing domestic and gender-based violence, including immediate safety planning, shelter assistance, mental health counseling for you and your children, legal help, and onsite child care. The centers are open Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm. Learn more at [www.nyc.gov/NYCHope](https://www.nyc.gov/NYCHope).

## Developmental Delays

- + **Early Intervention** services are available for children ages 0-3 who are not learning, playing, growing, talking or walking like other children their age. The program is free. Ask your care team for a referral.

## Medicaid Managed Care

If you have Medicaid Managed Care and need support with food, transportation, or housing, you can also contact a nonprofit organization in NYC:

- + **Bronx:** SOMOS Community Care, 833-766-6769
- + **Manhattan, Brooklyn, or Queens:** Public Health Solutions, 888-755-5045
- + **Staten Island:** Staten Island Performing Provider System (SIPPS), 917-830-1140



► **FINDHELP NEAR YOU!**

Go to [www.FindHelp.NYHealthAndHospitals.org](http://www.FindHelp.NYHealthAndHospitals.org) and enter your zip code to search for resources in your neighborhood, including diaper banks, food pantries, and much more. FindHelp has over 7,000 listings in New York City for free and low-cost resources.

► **ONE-ON-ONE SUPPORT**

Ask your care team for a referral to our Community Health Workers, Social Workers, or Maternal Home team who can meet with you one-on-one and help you navigate services available through NYC Health + Hospitals, city agencies, and community-based organizations.

Care for NYC. No Exceptions.

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