

# What happens to your body after giving birth?

New mums will go through physical and emotional changes, says obstetrician and gynaecologist Irene Chua who advises on what to look out for and how to cope



By understanding the changes that happen to your body after giving birth, you will be better equipped to handle the challenges ahead. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

You've probably read countless books to prepare for childbirth, but it's equally valuable to understand what happens to your body after delivery.

By being aware of these changes, you can better equip yourself to handle the challenges ahead. Obstetrician and gynaecologist Irene Chua shares what to look out for and how to care for yourself.

## **Q What are some changes that happen to a woman's body directly after giving birth?**

Some common issues women will experience include wound pain and discomfort, as well as vaginal bleeding.

Post-delivery wound pain may affect the perineum for those who had vaginal delivery, or the lower abdomen for those who had a Caesarian section.

The pain can usually be managed with painkillers for one to two weeks, after which your body goes through a natural recovery process, which also includes shrinking of the uterus.

You will also notice bright red and heavy vaginal bleeding known as lochia. This initially resembles a heavy menstrual flow, but will gradually lighten over four to six weeks.

Your breasts and nipples may become engorged, swollen and tender as you prepare to breastfeed. It's important to have a good lactation consultant to guide you on how to cope.

You may also experience postpartum depression in varying severities as you adjust to a new routine, lack of sleep and hormonal changes.

## **Q How can I recognise the signs of postpartum depression and what should I do?**

Typical signs include persistent sadness or mood changes with frequent crying spells for more than two weeks; loss of interest in activities,

including those related to the newborn; extreme fatigue despite adequate rest; feelings of guilt and worthlessness; as well as panic attacks.

It's important to recognise these signs early and reach out to your family members and obstetrician for proper diagnosis and treatment. Joining a support group and sharing sessions with new mothers may also be useful.

## **Q How can I establish a healthy breastfeeding relationship with my newborn?**

Early initiation, helping the baby to latch properly, and frequent feeding are all important. While you're in the hospital, engage the expertise of the nurses and lactation consultants to guide you through breastfeeding techniques.

Having adequate rest and adopting a positive outlook also helps in the bonding process as well as promoting a better milk supply.

## **Q What are the best ways to strengthen my body after giving birth?**

While you may naturally shift your focus to caring for your newborn, it's important not to neglect your own health and ensure you have proper nutrition, hydration and rest. It's advised to start pelvic floor exercises around two months after delivery. This will strengthen the perineal muscles to recover from stress incontinence faster and may prevent the earlier onset of urinary leakage.



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