

**The Postnatal Period**

**The first 5 days**

You will be in hospital for approximately 3-5 days after the birth of your baby. There is an extra bed in the postnatal room for your support person to stay overnight. I will see you daily and liaise with the midwifery team every day. This is the time that you are learning all about newborn feeding, settling, changing, bathing, wrapping and in time, routines. The midwives and lactation consultants are a great source of knowledge and support. There are lactation classes in the ward education room, which are worth attending. The baby will also have routine tests with your permission, such as a newborn screening test (heel prick blood test) on day 2-3, which checks for about 25 disorders including metabolic diseases, cystic fibrosis and thyroid disease. Your baby will also have a hearing test, an oxygen level and a neonatal examination by a paediatrician. Your baby will be weighed, measured and given vitamin K to help prevent a bleeding disorder and also a hepatitis B vaccination. You will be given a ‘Blue Book’, which has information about vaccinations, check-ups and milestones.

After both a caesarean and a vaginal birth, there will be vaginal bleeding like a heavy period for about 5 days, which then decreases gradually over time, stopping completely after 6-8 weeks. The bleeding is from the area inside the uterus where the placenta previously was. If you are worried about the amount of bleeding afterwards it is important to tell myself or the midwives, as occasionally there can be retained tissue or an infection as the reason for heavier than usual vaginal bleeding. It is important not to swim or have a bath until there has been no vaginal bleeding for at least 1 week, to minimise the chance of infection. Use only pads, not tampons and change regularly.

After a pregnancy, no matter what the type of birth, bladder care is very important. Passing urine at least every 3 hours in the first 2-3 days and double voiding (sit stand sit) ensures that the bladder is completely empty. If needed you will have stool softeners provided. Pelvic floor exercises are important for long-term pelvic floor strength. Seeing the physiotherapist whilst in hospital is a good idea. The physio will assess your abdominal separation; decide if you need abdominal support, as well as providing information on pelvic floor training and bladder and bowel care.

If you need vaccinations such as an MMR this will be done before discharge from the ward.

If you had a caesarean you will come back to the office for me to take out the skin stitch 1 week after the surgery. The deeper layers of stiches will all dissolve. If you have stitches after a vaginal delivery, it is important to wash the area in water twice/day and also after a bowel motion and keep the stitches clean and dry. The stitches will all either dissolve or fall out in time. If you think there is an infection or have any concerns it is important to let me know so that you can be checked.

**5 Days – 6 weeks**

You will be linked into the early childhood centre close to where you live, a great resource with early childhood nurses, lactation consultants and a parents group. You’ll find the early childhood health services link [here](https://www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/find-a-service/health-medical-services/early-childhood-service/sch).

The parents group is a great way to create a support network. There are also private lactation consultants who will visit you at home. You will also see your GP for baby check-ups and vaccinations at 6-8 weeks, which are outlined in the Blue Book. You may also wish to see a paediatrician for the baby’s check-up or if you have concerns.

Your vaginal bleeding will gradually decrease and cease.

If you have had a caesarean, avoid heavy lifting for 6 weeks, as this can affect the deeper layers healing.

Sleep is very important, and so accept help from whoever may be offering. It is OK not to get more done in a day than just looking after yourself and your baby. Babies gradually become faster at feeding and settling and everything does become more efficient and easier over time.

It is important not to drive if you are too tired, in pain or taking painkillers. Most people wait 2-3 weeks before driving however please check with your insurance company about rules.

If you are feeling flat, overwhelmed, anxious or depressed please tell myself, your GP, family, friends or your partner as this is common and help is easily arranged.

**6 weeks**

Baby check and vaccinations – GP/+/- paediatrician

You will have a mother's check-up at 6 weeks with myself. We will discuss contraception, do a cervical screening test if it is due, check the abdomen for separation of muscles, check the perineum or caesarean scar, do a mental health wellbeing check and discuss the recent birth and the potential future births. Your periods can return quite soon if formula feeding and variably from 2-12 months with breastfeeding. Contraception is important therefore, as periods indicate that ovulation has occurred and fertility has returned. It is also a good idea to keep a pad in your nappy bag incase of a surprise period arriving.

Gradually getting back to exercise is a good idea. Most people do a lot of walking as movement will help your baby sleep. There are physiotherapists who facilitate postnatal baby friendly exercise classes and also provide instructions on pelvic floor training. Check out the following helpful links:

[The Physiotherapy Clinic](https://www.physiotherapyclinic.com.au/)

[Women in Focus Physio](https://www.womeninfocusphysio.com.au/)

If you are due vaccinations please see your GP for these, such an MMR or VZV.

There are 2 recent studies looking at Covid vaccines given to breastfeeding women. Both studies found that the antibody levels in the breast milk were very high. This would give the baby protection in 2 ways – having a protected mother and also via passive immunity. I would strongly consider having the Covid vaccine for the benefit of yourself and your child, and encouraging family and friends to be fully vaccinated also.