

POSTNATAL (AFTER BIRTH) CARE

Description

The period after the birth of your baby is called the postnatal period. Midwives can care for you and your baby up until the baby is 28 days old should you need regular help and support. In most cases the midwife will discharge you and your baby to the care of a health visitor when your baby is between 10 and 14 days old.

Postnatal care consists of three checkups namely: postnatal checks, baby checks and paediatrician checks.

Steps to follow

Postnatal checks

- The midwife will check the baby's temperature, pulse and blood pressure at least once a day during your hospital stay depending on the type of birth you had.
- The midwife will talk to you to make sure you are happy with feeding your baby. If you are breastfeeding she will make sure you are positioning your baby correctly as to not become sore or cracked.
- The midwife will feel your abdomen to ensure your uterus (womb) is contracted and ensure your blood loss is normal.
- If you required stitches of the perineum, the midwife will check to make sure it is healing well and there are no signs of infection.
- If you had a Caesarean section your wound will be checked to make sure no signs of infection are developing.
- The midwife will make sure you are able to pass urine without any problems and that you are opening your bowels. It is normal for you not to need to open your bowels for two to three days after the birth.
- Postnatal exercises and a diet will be discussed with you and you may be seen by the obstetric physiotherapist who will advise you on certain issues.

Baby checks

- Your baby's skin and colour will be observed for signs of jaundice. Babies often get jaundiced around day three or four.
- The midwife will check your baby's mouth for signs of thrush and check your baby's eyes to make sure they are not infected.
- The midwife will check baby's cord to ensure it is drying up adequately. She will show you how to look after the cord, which should be kept clean and dry.
- Feeding will be discussed and assistance given where necessary.

Paediatrician checks

- The baby will be checked by a paediatrician before you leave the hospital.
- The paediatrician will check the baby's heart and the hips. This check-up cannot be carried out before your baby is six hours old, because it takes that long for the baby's circulation to change from foetal circulation to baby circulation and this will affect the way the heart sounds.

Legal framework

This service is provided in terms of the National Health Act, 2003 (Act 61 of 2003) and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996

Service standard

Your stay can be anything from as little as six hours to 48 hours for a normal birth and between three and four days for a Caesarean section. It varies from one person to another.

Cost

Public hospitals charge a minimum fee and private hospitals a different fee.

Forms to complete

Forms will be available at the hospital on admission and a folder will be created.