

Recovering From a C-Section at Home

You're recovering from major surgery while caring for a newborn. **Healing isn't a race**, and every recovery looks a little different. Always follow the discharge instructions from your own care team.



! Your job isn't to "bounce back." **It's to heal, listen to your body and get help when you need it.**

CARING FOR YOUR BODY

- **Stay ahead of pain**
Take medication as directed instead of waiting until pain is overwhelming. Use opioids only as long as you need them.
- **Care for your incision**
Keep it clean and dry, pat dry after showering and check it daily. Avoid baths, hot tubs and swimming until your provider says it's healed enough.
- **Expect bleeding**
The placenta leaves a wound inside your uterus, a bit like a big scab. Bleeding gets lighter over about 4–6 weeks.
- **Constipation, diarrhea and gas**
Either can be normal after surgery. Drink fluids, eat fiber and walk. A simethicone gas reliever like Gas-X may help.
- **Prevent blood clots**
Walk regularly, and keep using any blood-thinner shots or compression stockings as directed.

Recovery isn't a straight line

Feeling more sore after a busy day is common. It's a sign to slow down, not that you've failed. If you're worried, check in with your care team.

A ROUGH TIMELINE

Weeks 1–2

Incision pain is strongest, then eases.

Weeks 2–6

Energy returns. Bleeding tapers off.

Around 6 weeks

Many feel mostly recovered. Deeper healing takes months.

MOVING AND DAILY LIFE

- **Support your incision**
Roll to your side to get out of bed. Hold a small pillow to your belly when you cough, laugh or ride in the car. Ask whether an abdominal binder is right for you.
- **Go slow**
Walk a little more each day. Don't lift anything heavier than your baby until you're cleared.
- **Driving, exercise and sex**
Driving is often okay around 2 weeks, once you're off opioids and can brake without pain. Exercise and sex often wait until about 6 weeks.
- **Feeding**
Try side-lying or football holds, or use a nursing pillow for a cradle hold.

GET CARE RIGHT AWAY

Emergency? Call 911.

- Soaking a pad in an hour or clots bigger than a golf ball
- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher
- Incision opening, pus or foul-smelling drainage
- Headache that won't go away or vision changes
- Trouble breathing, chest pain or racing heart
- Pain, swelling or redness in one leg or arm
- Severe belly pain that doesn't go away
- Extreme swelling of your hands or face
- Dizziness or fainting
- Thoughts of harming yourself or your baby

Tell them you were pregnant within the last year.

Emotional recovery

Baby blues usually fade within 2 weeks. Feelings that last or feel overwhelming deserve support.

Maternal Mental Health Hotline: call or text 1-833-TLC-MAMA, 24/7

Crisis line: call or text 988

Accept practical help

When someone asks what they can do, give them a job:

"Can you bring dinner?"

"Can you do a load of laundry?"

"Can you bring the baby to me?"

"Can you watch the older kids?"

Rest is part of your recovery.

Sources: ACOG (Cesarean Birth FAQ); CDC Hear Her (Urgent Maternal Warning Signs); HRSA National Maternal Mental Health Hotline; Postpartum Support International.

This summary is for education only and is not a substitute for medical advice. Always follow your care team's instructions and contact them with concerns.

Read the full article: birthx.org/blog/recovering-from-a-c-section