

Head-To-Toe Postpartum Changes

SHIVERING

Women may experience shivering shortly after birth which may last for a couple minutes to an hour. The exact cause behind this phenomenon is unknown.

HOT FLASHES

Hot flashes that may occur postpartum have to do with the decrease in estrogen levels and the overall change in the body's ability to regulate temperature.

BREASTS

Breast engorgement may result in firm and full breasts. This may feel sore/painful to the mother. Engorgement usually occurs within 24-72 hours postpartum.

UTERUS

The uterus starts to go back to the size it was prior to pregnancy. This usually takes 6-8 weeks. It will continue to contract after birth in order to prevent excessive blood loss. The fundus will be firm as a result.

CERVIX

The cervix remains dilated 2-3 cm for the first few days after birth. The cervical os does not go back to the shape it was prior to pregnancy/birth. Instead of the smooth circular opening, it turns into a large transverse slit. It takes the cervix 3-4 months to recover fully after birth.

HEMATOLOGY

Hematologic changes usually return to normal by 6-12 weeks postpartum. Therefore, women are at an increased risk for venous thrombosis (blood clots) postpartum.

HAIR AND SKIN

Hair loss may be present 1-5 months postpartum. Usually, normal hair growth resumes by 6-15 months postpartum. Stretch marks change from a pink/red color to silvery. These are permanent. Chloasma and hyperpigmentation from pregnancy usually resolves.

CARDIOVASCULAR

In the first hour postpartum, cardiac output/stroke volume are both increased by 50-70%. Heart rate decreases by 15%. The cardiac preload increases while the uterus decompresses after delivery.

ABDOMINAL WALL

Although the normal abdominal muscle tone usually recovers within several weeks, the separation of the rectus abdominis muscles may persist. This is known as "rectus abdominis diastasis".

LOCHIA

The endometrium sheds after the placenta comes out so that a new layer of tissue can regenerate. This manifests as blood and tissue called lochia rubra (lasts for the first few days), lochia serosa (lasts for 5-9 days), and lochia alba (lasts for 10-14 days). In total, lochia usually lasts for 6-8 weeks postpartum.

G.I./RECTAL

Constipation and hemorrhoids may develop due to hormonal shifts and pain medication.

PAIN

There may be several sources of pain postpartum: afterpains, vaginal/perineal lacerations, cesarean delivery, tender breasts, etc. Common medications given postpartum include acetaminophen, NSAIDs, and opioids for severe pain.

FLUIDS

There may be a lot of sweating and urination for the first 2 weeks postpartum. Since there is quite a bit of fluid retained during pregnancy, the body rids itself of the excess fluid during this time.

