

## Pain Control After a Vaginal Birth

*This chapter explains the types of pain you may have after a vaginal birth. It includes how long your pain may last, treatment options, and when to call your doctor.*

We want to lessen any pain and discomfort that you may have after giving birth. Your comfort is an important part of your recovery. It will allow you to care for yourself and your baby and help you to enjoy these precious first days with your new baby.

The 2 types of pain that are most common after vaginal birth are:

- Uterine cramps (most often while breastfeeding)
- Pain in your vagina, if you have a tear or swelling

Each person feels pain in different ways. Some of the symptoms you may have are listed in this chapter. We will work with you to make sure you are as comfortable as possible.

### Uterine Pain

#### Symptoms

These symptoms may last 5 to 7 days after you give birth:

- Tenderness
- Cramping
  - May be more intense in pregnancies that go past term
  - May increase when you breastfeed for the first 1 to 5 days after giving birth



*Being comfortable will help you bond with your baby.*

## Treatment Options

- Empty your bladder often.
- Place a heating pad on your abdomen, especially during breastfeeding.
- Take ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) or acetaminophen (Tylenol). You may take these 2 medicines at the same time. Or, take one medicine to cover several hours, then take the other kind of medicine to cover the several hours after that:
  - **Ibuprofen:** 400 mg by mouth every 4 hours, 600 mg by mouth every 6 hours, **or** 800 mg by mouth every 8 hours (do not take more than 2,400 mg in 24 hours)
  - **Acetaminophen:** 650 mg by mouth every 4 hours (do not take more than 3,000 mg in 24 hours)

If you take acetaminophen for pain:

- **Make sure that other medicines you are taking do not also contain acetaminophen.** Ask your healthcare provider if you have any questions.



*Call your doctor or nurse if you have any symptoms listed at the right.*

## Call Your Doctor or Nurse If:

- Your pain is constant.
- Your pain does not ease even after you take pain medicines.
- You have a fever of 101°F (38.3°C) or higher, or chills (**call right away**).
- You have a sudden, ongoing increase in vaginal discharge, or the discharge has a bad smell.

## Pain in Your Vaginal Area

### Symptoms

Soreness, discomfort, and swelling may last up to 2 weeks, depending on how severe your tearing or swelling is.

### Treatment Options

- Use cold packs, such as a bag of frozen peas, for 24 to 72 hours.
  - Place a clean cloth or towel over your skin, then the cold pack. Do **not** place the cold pack right on your skin.
  - Leave the cold pack on for **only** 20 minutes at a time, not longer.

- Use witch hazel pads.
- Use a peri bottle to clean the area around your vagina, and change the peri pad often.
- Take ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) or acetaminophen (Tylenol). You may take these 2 medicines at the same time, Or, take 1 medicine to cover several hours, then take the other kind of medicine to cover the several hours after that:
  - **Ibuprofen:** 400 mg by mouth every 4 hours, 600 mg by mouth every 6 hours, **or** 800 mg by mouth every 8 hours (do not take more than 2,400 mg in 24 hours)
  - **Acetaminophen:** 650 mg by mouth every 4 hours (do not take more than 3,000 mg in 24 hours)

If you take acetaminophen for pain:

- **Make sure that other medicines you are taking do not also contain acetaminophen.** Ask your healthcare provider if you have any questions.

**If you have a 3rd or 4th degree tear:**

- You may be given a prescription pain medicine to help ease pain that is not controlled by ibuprofen and acetaminophen. It is safe to use this pain medicine while you are breastfeeding. A very small amount will enter your breast milk, but there is no long-term harm to your baby from the medicine.
- You can buy dibucaine ointment at the drugstore without a prescription. This is a numbing medicine that is usually used for hemorrhoids. It can be used on your vaginal area.
  - Do **not** use dibucaine ointment if you know you are allergic to numbing medicines like lidocaine or novocaine.
  - Call your doctor if it makes your pain or swelling worse.
- Drink plenty of water and eat lots of fruits and vegetables. This helps your bowel movements stay soft so that they pass more easily.
- You may want to use a stool softener such as Colace (docusate sodium) for a few weeks. You can buy this at a drugstore without a prescription. Softening your stool eases the pressure on your tear and helps it heal. Take the stool softener with 1 to 2 glasses of water, and be sure to drink 6 to 8 glasses of water every day.



*If you have hemorrhoids, drink plenty of water and eat lots of fruits and vegetables.*

### **Call Your Doctor or Nurse If:**

- Your pain is not improving over time, or it is getting worse.
- Your redness or swelling is getting worse, especially if it worsens suddenly.
- You have discharge from your vagina that has a bad smell.

### **Treating Hemorrhoids**

If you have hemorrhoids:

- To relieve discomfort, try soaking your bottom in the special “sitz bath” your nurse may give you.
- Use medicated witch hazel pads (Tucks) or witch hazel ointment.
- Try dibucaine ointment, a numbing medicine you can buy at a drugstore without a prescription. **Do not** use dibucaine ointment if you know you are allergic to numbing medicines like lidocaine or novocaine. Call your doctor if dibucaine makes your hemorrhoids worse.
- Drink plenty of water and eat lots of fruits and vegetables, This will help your bowel movements stay soft so they pass more easily.
- You may use a stool softener to help keep your bowels soft for a few weeks. One of these is Colace (docusate sodium). You can buy this at a drugstore without a prescription. Softening your stool will ease the pressure on your tear and help it heal. Take the stool softener with 1 to 2 glasses of water, and be sure to drink 6 to 8 glasses of water every day.

### **Questions?**

Your questions are important. If you have questions about post-partum pain, call your healthcare provider during office hours.