

Bleeding after birth

This information sheet aims to answer some commonly asked questions about bleeding after birth. Informed consent and woman centred care are integral to health care in Queensland. Decisions about your care are always up to you.

IMPORTANT: This is general information only. Ask your doctor, midwife or nurse about your own situation.

Is bleeding normal after birth?

Yes, vaginal bleeding (also called lochia) is normal after giving birth. Bleeding occurs after a vaginal birth or a caesarean birth.

What is normal blood loss?

Blood loss can be different for each woman. It can vary in colour, be heavier or lighter, and slow down at different rates. Most women will stop bleeding 4–6 weeks after giving birth. Your bleeding should get less and lighter in colour over time.

Sometimes your bleeding may be heavier. This should only be for a short time. It can happen when you:

- sit or stand after lying down for a while, as the blood collects in your vagina
- exercise, as the movement increases blood flow
- breastfeed, as it causes your uterus to contract

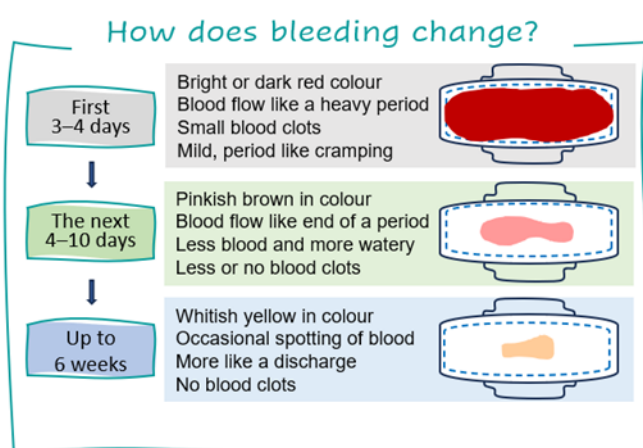


Image: showing bleeding pattern after birth

Are blood clots normal?

A blood clot is a clump of blood that sticks together. Passing small (e.g. pea or marble size) blood clots is common.

In the first day after birth, you might pass bigger blood clots (e.g. golf ball size). If this happens, tell your healthcare provider or show them the clot. The number and size of blood clots gets less over the next few days.

Managing your bleeding

After birth, you can use pads or period underwear (underwear designed to absorb blood). Dark coloured period underwear can make it harder to see your blood loss.

To help prevent infection, wash your hands and change your pad or period underwear frequently.

Do not use internal products like tampons and menstrual cups for the first six weeks. These can increase the chance of getting an infection.

What are afterbirth pains?

After birth your uterus contracts and gets smaller as it returns to its normal shape and size.

A contracted uterus helps reduce bleeding. Passing urine often and breastfeeding can help keep your uterus contracted.

As your uterus contracts, you may feel cramps (known as afterbirth pains) in your lower belly. If the cramps are uncomfortable, heat packs or simple pain relief medicines (paracetamol or ibuprofen) may help. Ask your healthcare provider for advice.



Checking your uterus

After birth, the top of your uterus (known as the fundus) will be at about the level of your belly button. It feels hard and round. Over time it gets smaller until you cannot feel it anymore.

Your healthcare provider will regularly feel the top of your uterus to check it is contracting as expected. You can feel it as well. Knowing what your uterus feels like can help you notice if things change.

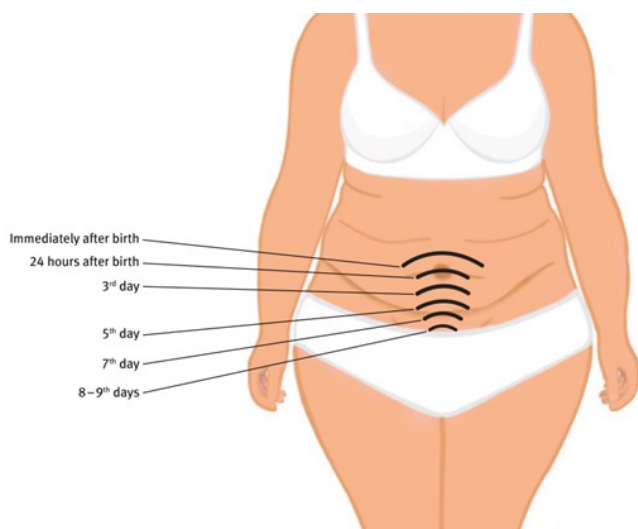


Image: showing fundal height by days after birth

What causes increased bleeding?

Bleeding can increase if:

- your uterus is not contracting properly
- there is tissue from the placenta still in your uterus stopping it from contracting
- you have an injury to your vagina, cervix or uterus that is bleeding
- you have an infection

When to contact your healthcare provider

Contact your healthcare provider or local hospital if you:

- have heavy bleeding (soaking more than one pad every 1–2 hours)
- have a sudden return to bright red blood loss
- pass large (bigger than golf ball size) or several blood clots
- have bad smelling blood loss (different to your normal period)
- have a greenish vaginal discharge
- have a high temperature (above 37.5°C) a fever or chills
- feel faint, dizzy, weak or have trouble breathing
- are worried that your bleeding or discharge is not normal

Support & information

13HEALTH (13 432584) telephone service providing health information, referral and services to the public.

<https://www.qld.gov.au/health/contacts/advice/13health>

Pregnancy, Birth & Baby (1800 882 436) free, confidential, information and counselling for women, their partners and families relating to issues of conception, pregnancy, birthing and postnatal care. <https://www.pregnancybirthbaby.org.au>

www.pregnancybirthbaby.org.au

Queensland Clinical Guidelines Parent information <https://www.health.qld.gov.au/qcg>

Women's Health Queensland health promotion, information and education service for women and health professionals. <https://womenshealth.org.au>

Australian Breastfeeding Association 1800 686 268 (breastfeeding helpline). Community based self-help group offers information, counselling, and support services on breastfeeding issues. <https://www.breastfeeding.asn.au>

Perinatal Depression and Anxiety Australia (PANDA) 1(300 726 306). Supports parents during pregnancy and throughout the first year of parenthood. <https://www.panda.org.au>

Australasian Birth Trauma Association (0412 445 770) Information, educational material and 'peer2peer' support for people experiencing birth trauma. <https://www.birthingtrauma.org.au>