

Bleeding after birth

This information sheet aims to answer some commonly asked questions about bleeding after birth.

IMPORTANT: This is general information only. It is not intended as advice for your individual circumstances. Ask your health care provider for more information.

Is vaginal bleeding normal after birth?

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

What is normal blood loss after birth?

In the first 1–2 days after your baby is born, bleeding is usually bright red in colour. On the first day you may soak up to one sanitary pad each hour. Over the next several days, the bleeding will slowly get less each day and change colour from bright red to a pink or brown colour and then to a creamy colour. Most women will stop bleeding between four and six weeks after giving birth. Some women may bleed for longer or shorter than this.

You may have heavier bleeding:

- in the morning when you get up
- after breastfeeding
- after exercising

Are blood clots normal?

A blood clot is a mass of blood that sticks together and forms a jelly-like substance. Passing blood clots is common after having a baby. In the first 24 hours after birth, clots may be golf-ball sized or larger. The clots should get smaller and happen less often as your bleeding gets less over the first few days.

What causes bleeding?

When you were pregnant, blood vessels ran between your uterus and placenta. When the placenta comes away from the wall of the uterus (after your baby is born), there are open blood vessels that bleed. Your uterus contracts to squeeze these bleeding vessels shut. Over 7–10 days your uterus continues to contract, begins to heal and the bleeding gets less.

What causes bleeding to increase?

An increase in bleeding can happen because:

- Your uterus isn't contracting properly
- There is tissue from the placenta in your uterus preventing it from contracting
- You have an injury to your vagina, cervix or uterus causing bleeding
- You have an infection

Can you tell if your uterus is contracted normally?

In the first 24 hours after birth, the top of your uterus (the fundus) can be felt around the level of your belly button. It will feel a bit like a grapefruit in size and texture. As your uterus contracts, it will slowly decrease in size and be felt lower down on your abdomen. Around 7–10 days after birth your uterus will have contracted so much that you can no longer feel it.

You can ask your healthcare provider to help you find the top of your uterus so you will know what a well contracted uterus feels like. This will help you notice if your uterus does not continue to contract normally.

Emptying your bladder frequently (passing urine) in the first 24 hours after birth can help your uterus to stay contracted.

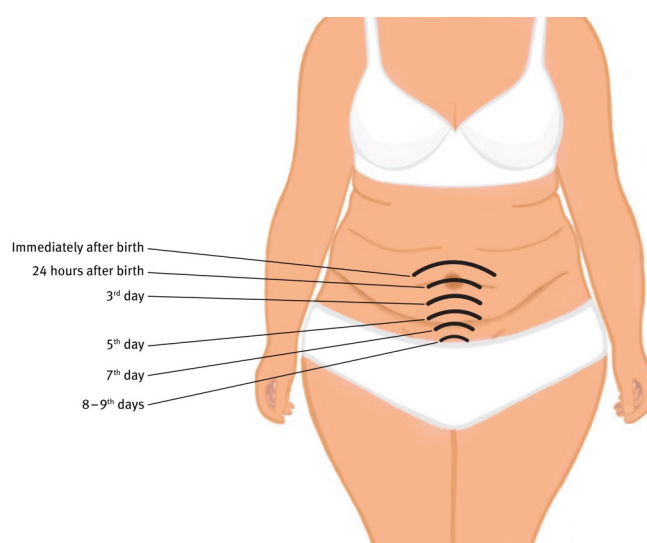


Image: Fundal height days after birth



When should you seek help?

If you gave birth more than 24 hours ago, contact your health care provider if:

- You are still soaking more than one pad every 1–2 hours
- The amount of bleeding suddenly increases or you pass large clots
- The blood suddenly changes to a bright red colour
- You feel dizzy, weak, sweaty or have trouble breathing
- Your vaginal loss smells, or you have a high temperature
- You are worried that your bleeding is not normal

Comfort, support and information

13HEALTH (13 432584) is a phone line that provides health information, referral and services to the public.

Pregnancy, Birth & Baby Helpline (1800 882 436 - free call) offers free, confidential, professional information and counselling for women, their partners and families relating to issues of conception, pregnancy, birthing and postnatal care
www.health.gov.au/pregnancyhelpline

Lifeline (13 11 14) Lifeline offers a telephone crisis support service to anyone www.lifeline.org.au