



SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF
PUBLIC HEALTH

THE 4TH TRIMESTER



*Postpartum care
for you and your baby*



The 4th Trimester: *Changes for Mom*

At your prenatal visits, your pregnancy was probably measured in 3 trimesters over the last 40 weeks. What you may not know, is there is another trimester after delivery. The 12 weeks immediately following birth is sometimes referred to as the “**4th trimester**”. This is a time for women to physically heal and adjust to taking care of a new baby. Many changes occur during this time for both mom and baby.

In addition to the changes that take place during pregnancy, after delivery a woman’s body goes through many transitions to return to its normal state. This does not happen overnight. In fact, it may take up to a year to fully recover physically, mentally, and hormonally from pregnancy and delivery.

Maternal Mortality and Warning Signs

Maternal mortality is a death that occurs up to one year after delivery because of pregnancy complications. Most maternal deaths occur in the 42 days following birth. Although rare, there can be postpartum conditions that if not treated, could result in death. **It is very important to schedule and attend your postpartum follow-up visit!** The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) recommends contacting your doctor within 3 weeks of delivery and a postpartum visit no later than 12 weeks after birth. The postpartum visit is critical for higher risk individuals or those who had a chronic condition monitored during pregnancy. If you fall into one of these categories, you may need to be seen sooner.

Pregnant now or within the last year?

Get medical care right away if you experience any of the following symptoms:



Headache that won't go away or gets worse over time



Dizziness or fainting



Changes in your vision



Fever of 100.4°F or higher



Extreme swelling of your hands or face



Thoughts of harming yourself or your baby



Trouble breathing



Chest pain or fast beating heart



Severe nausea and throwing up



Severe belly pain that doesn't go away



Baby's movement stopping or slowing during pregnancy



Severe swelling, redness or pain of your leg or arm



Vaginal bleeding or fluid leaking during pregnancy



Heavy vaginal bleeding or discharge after pregnancy



Overwhelming tiredness

*Source: CDC: "Hear Her," <https://www.cdc.gov/hearher/resources/download-share/docs/pdf/Warning-Signs-Poster-11x17-h.pdf>

If you experience any sudden changes in your health in the chart above such as blurred vision, headaches, trouble breathing, or extreme bleeding, get help immediately! These are signs of potentially fatal conditions, and you need to seek medical care as soon as possible.



Mood & Emotional Well-Being

After pregnancy, your body goes through a lot of changes. You may hear about the term “baby blues”. These are normal and many new moms experience some form of the blues which typically improve within 2 weeks. This is different from postpartum depression.

Around 1 in 7 women will suffer from depression or anxiety during or after pregnancy and symptoms can begin anytime within the first year after giving birth.

These symptoms include but are not limited to:

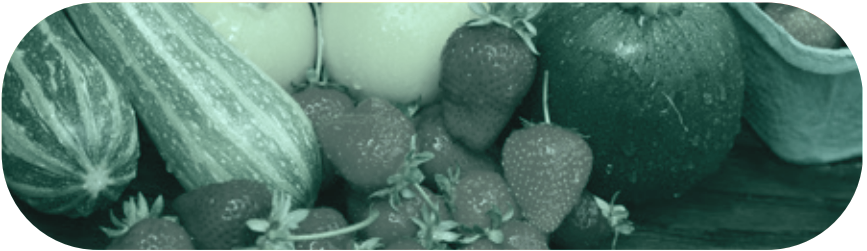
Feeling sad, hopeless, or overwhelmed	Feeling very anxious or worrying too much	Being irritable or cranky
Change in appetite and eating habits	Not wanting to be with friends and family	Trouble concentrating or making decisions
Loss of interest in things you used to enjoy	Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much	Showing too much or not enough concern for your baby

Contact your health care provider if you experience any of these symptoms.

Physical Healing

Physically healing after pregnancy takes time. Here are some tips that may help you ease back into a health and fitness routine and give you the energy you need to take care of your baby.

- Eat a healthy, balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids.
- Light exercise, such as walking or yoga, can also help you heal and even improve your mental health.
- Rest! It can be difficult to adjust to new routines with an infant. Try to rest when baby sleeps, making sure baby is in their own safe sleep space such as an empty crib or bassinet.
- Be sure to talk with your health care provider before returning to intense workouts, especially if you had a C-section.



Remember it's OK to take time for needed self-care and many resources are available if you need help. Healthy moms are equally as important as healthy babies.



The 4th Trimester: *Your Baby*

Your baby just spent the last 9 months in the safety of your womb. It was warm, soothing, and nutrition was available around the clock. Now, they are experiencing loud noises, bright lights, and a big world to explore. In the first 3 months, your baby will go through many developmental growths, mentally and physically.



Both breastmilk and formula can provide the important nutrients your baby needs.



Feedings

When babies are born, their stomachs are around the size of a marble. At one month old, the stomach is still small, around the size of an egg. Because their stomach is so small, feedings are frequent, usually every few hours. This is true whether you decide to breastfeed or formula feed your baby.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends breastfeeding for at least the first 6 months and continuing to breastfeed for as long as you can.

Safe Sleep

Newborns sleep around 14-17 hours per day. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends **sharing a room, not a bed**. This way baby can be close to you but in their own safe sleep area.

Remember, safe sleep is as easy as **ABC**:

- Baby should be **Alone** in their sleep space with no other people, objects, toys, pillows, loose blankets, etc.
- Baby should always be placed on their **Back** to sleep. Babies can be swaddled on their back up until they start to show signs of rolling over, around 2 months.
- The best place for a baby to sleep is their own **Crib** or bassinet with a flat, non-inclined mattress. Babies should never sleep on adult beds, cushions, air mattresses, sofas, or recliners.

Crying & Colic

Babies communicate by crying. It can be frustrating to hear your baby cry for a long period of time. If you feel overwhelmed, pause, place your baby in a safe space (such as an empty crib), and spend a few minutes in a separate room. Never shake a baby for any reason! If your baby is extremely fussy, especially at specific times and for no clear reason, they may have colic. If you feel your baby is crying longer than normal, contact your baby's health care provider. They may be able to provide advice to help.



Safe Play Time With Your Newborn



Reading is a great way to bond with your baby and let them hear your voice.



Babies like to watch what you are doing, even simple chores like folding laundry or cooking dinner. Let them watch from a safe location while doing everyday activities.



Tummy time is important to help baby strengthen muscles which will help them sit up and crawl. Tummy time should be done only when baby is awake, and an adult is there to supervise.



Keep your baby safe and healthy by **washing your hands** often with soap and water.

Follow-up Care: *For Mom and Baby*



For Mom

Before you leave the hospital, your doctor may go ahead and schedule your postpartum check-up. **It is important that you attend this visit**, especially if you had any conditions monitored during your pregnancy such as high blood pressure.

Depending on your health condition during your pregnancy, a postpartum check-up may be scheduled between 2-12 weeks. For most, it takes place around 6 weeks.

At this visit, your doctor will do a complete physical exam including a pelvic and breast exam, depression screening, and discuss birth control options. At this time, you may also talk about moving your care to a primary care provider for any additional follow-up care.

For Baby

Your baby will need a check-up shortly after birth. This visit is usually 48-72 hours after discharge from the hospital. At this visit, your baby's doctor will check baby's measurements, do a physical examination, talk about any feeding concerns, and make sure your baby receives recommended immunizations on time.

At the end of the visit, your baby's doctor will talk with you about scheduling the next well-child visit and how to contact them if you have any concerns about your baby's health or development.

The CDC's Milestone Tracker App is an excellent tool you can use to track your baby's development, track appointments, and more from your phone! Download the app in your phone's app store or learn more at [cdc.gov/MilestoneTracker](https://www.cdc.gov/MilestoneTracker).

Resources

- **HRSA National Maternal Mental Health Hotline:**
Call or text 1-833-TLC-MAMA (1-833-852-6262)
- **CDC Hear Her Campaign:** cdc.gov/hearher/index.html
- **DPH Safe Sleep, Every Sleep:** dph.sc.gov/safesleep
- **CDC Developmental Milestones:**
cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html
- **DPH Postpartum Newborn Home Visit program:**
dph.sc.gov/health-wellness/family-planning/pregnancy/postpartum-newborn-home-visits
- **South Carolina Postpartum Support International:**
psichapters.com/sc
- **MUSC Mom's IMPACTT:** muschealth.org/medical-services/womens/reproductive-behavioral-health/moms-impact
- **Healthy Children:** healthychildren.org

