

Looking after yourself

Blood loss (lochia)

Some bleeding after birth is normal – this is recorded in your notes as estimated blood loss (EBL). Vaginal bleeding after birth is referred to as lochia, which is a mix of blood and other products from inside the uterus. This can be quite heavy at first, requiring several sanitary pad changes a day. After the first week the lochia slows down and becomes pink/light brown in colour. This loss will normally disappear by four weeks post birth.

Any large clots, silky ‘membranes’, sudden heavy bleeding or an offensive smell may be a sign that something is wrong and should be discussed with your midwife or GP urgently.

After pains

Period type pains after the birth of your baby are normal and are caused by the contraction of your uterus as it returns to its pre-pregnancy size and tone. It is normal for these pains to feel stronger when you breastfeed your baby due to the effect of hormones released during a feed, causing the uterus to contract. Any severe after pains can be treated with paracetamol. Make sure you read the label, and speak to your local pharmacist if you are unsure about this medication.

Breasts

The milk that your breasts first produce is called colostrum, and this will be present in the breast from mid-way through your pregnancy. The colostrum helps protect your baby from allergies and disease. Around three days after birth, the colostrum changes and becomes mature milk – and this change may make your breasts feel heavy and tender. Engorgement can happen if your breasts become over full of milk. This can be relieved with frequent breastfeeding. If your breasts feel so full that your baby is unable to take the breast, hand expressing a little of your milk can help. You can contact your midwife, health visitor or breastfeeding support worker if you are worried about your breasts being engorged. More information about breastfeeding can be found on **page 29** of this leaflet.