

Factors That Influence Postpartum Recovery

by Penny Simkin

Postpartum recovery is a complex process that is influenced by many factors and processes. When the latter occur smoothly and harmoniously, recovery is optimal and will be completed in 4 to 8 weeks. Many factors, however, can inhibit or prolong recovery. This table lists factors that contribute to a rapid and uncomplicated recovery and other factors that contribute to a prolonged or difficult recovery.

TIME PERIOD	FACTORS THAT ENHANCE RECOVERY	FACTORS THAT INHIBIT OR PROLONG RECOVERY
1. Pre-pregnancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent physical health and fitness • Good mental health • Family support • Financial well-being • Positive experiences relating to health care or reproduction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor health and fitness • Personal or family history of mental illness • Dysfunctional family of origin or lack of family support • Financial worries • Previous negative experiences with health care providers or with reproduction
2. Pregnancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Same as above plus:</i> • Good self-care • Health maintenance, freedom from pregnancy complications • Thriving, healthy fetus • Good relationship with caregiver 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Same as above plus:</i> • Unhealthy or stressful pregnancy, complications or poor self-care • Fetus not thriving, or in questionable health • Little contact or poor relationship with caregiver
3. Birth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom from complications • Continuity in care from staff • Support and assistance of a doula • Labor of normal length • Minimal procedures (i.e. no induction, augmentation, forceps, vacuum extraction, episiotomy, or cesarean section) • Normal vaginal birth • Healthy, term newborn • Immediate, prolonged contact with and feeding of newborn 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fetal complications • Lack of continuity in care • Fear of labor, staff, procedures • Variation in personality and approach among nurses and caregivers • Prolonged labor requiring heavy use of pain or other medications and procedures • Cesarean birth • Baby who needs special care in nursery • Baby with feeding difficulties • Early separation of newborn from client
4. First Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate rest for client and partner • Adequate help, nourishment, and support for client and partner • Good healing of any incisions • Milk comes in • Baby nurses well • Mellow, responsive baby • Consistent advice from staff regarding self-care, infant care and feeding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exhaustion in client/partner; inability to sleep, lack of help, isolation, loneliness • Fussy, needy baby; poor feeder • Infection, illness in client, poor incision healing • Pain (perineum, incision, chest tissue, other) • Newborn problems • Delay in milk production • Excessive engorgement • Contradictory advice from staff members

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5. Next Week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>All of the above plus:</i> • Help at home with newborn care, food preparation, household chores, visitors • Access to resources for emotional, physical, lactation assistance • Good relationship with baby's grandparents/family • Evidence of successful lactation and feeding (changing infant stool patterns, wet diapers, good latch, no nipple soreness or excessive engorgement) • Good physical recovery for client • Predictable, responsive infant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>All of the above plus:</i> • Isolation, lack of support or help for client • Strain, overwork, lack of rest for partner • Lack of access or knowledge about resources • Tension, lack of trust with baby's grandparents • Poor start in feeding • Physical problems for client, pain, poor healing • "Fussy" needy baby who is difficult to calm, cries a lot, sleeps very little
6. First one to two months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normal infant development • Complete physical recovery in client • Support network (friends, family, professionals) for client/partner • Continued successful lactation and feeding (good weight gain, latch, no nipple pain) • Competence and confidence in soothing, calming baby • Adequate rest for client • Emotional well-being (absence of mood disturbances) • Access to appropriate preventive, supportive, resources • Loving, caring relationship with partner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abnormalities in infant development • Persistent physical problems in client • Lack of social support for client/couple • Feeding problems (poor weight gain, mastitis, nipple pain, thrush, low milk production, reflux in baby, nipple confusion) • "High needs" colicky baby • Sleep deprivation in client • Postpartum mood disorders, PTSD • Lack of postpartum services • Poor relationship with partner or family