

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. • Experience caring for newborns. 	<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, or 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 mother,
4. First Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate rest for mother and partner, • Adequate help, nourishment, and support for mother 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 mother/partner; inability to sleep, lack of help, isolation, loneliness, • Fussy, needy baby; poor feeder, • Infection, illness in mother, poor incision healing, • Maternal pain (perineum, incision, breasts, other), • Newborn problems, • Delay in milk production, • Excessive engorgement, • Contradictory advice from staff members.
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, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>All of the above plus:</i> • Isolation, lack of support or help for mother, • Strain, overwork, lack of rest for partner, • Lack of access or knowledge about

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> physical, breastfeeding assistance, • Good relationship with baby's grandparents/family, • Evidence of successful breastfeeding (changing infant stool patterns, wet diapers, good latch, no nipple soreness or excessive engorgement), • Good maternal physical recovery. • Predictable, responsive infant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> resources, • Tension, lack of trust with baby's grandparents, • Poor start in feeding, • Maternal physical problems, 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 mother, • Support network (friends, family, professionals), for mother/partner, • Continued successful breastfeeding (good weight gain, latch, no nipple pain), • Competence and confidence in soothing, calming baby, • Adequate rest for mother, • 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 mother, • Lack of social support for woman/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 mother, • Postpartum mood disorders, PTSD, • Lack of postpartum services, • Poor relationship with partner or family.