

A decorative border of black and white line art surrounds the central text. It features stylized flowers, leaves, and vines, with some elements resembling berries or small blossoms. The border is thick and frames the entire page.

# Mothering Matters

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Parenting in Switzerland

WHAT'S NEW

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## POST-PARTUM: YOUR NEW BODY

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A woman's body experiences significant physical changes during pregnancy; however, these changes are not all permanent. Once the baby is out of the womb, the body begins its physical healing process, returning itself to its pre-pregnancy state. The uterus begins to reduce in size almost immediately after delivery, and its lining crumbles and drains away in the form of lochia. You will ultimately lose some weight as regular activity and eating is resumed again. And yes, the itchy skin, the soreness, the mood swings, and the acne all tend to go away within a few months. Major organs such as the heart, the lungs and the circulatory system, once burdened during pregnancy, return to normal functioning. However, there are certain changes, like bust size, that might be permanent. Below I will discuss both impermanent and permanent changes in detail.

### The uterus: contractions and bleeding

After delivery, the uterus continues to contract in order to expel the placenta and membranes. Immediately after the placenta is delivered your uterus weighs approximately 1 kg; then it continues to reduce its size with contractions (known as "afterpains"). The larger the uterus (e.g., twin pregnancy) the harder it must contract to resume its normal shape. Contractions may be so strong that they make you gasp or hold your breath, and they may get worse when you breastfeed.

Contractions may continue for a week or more and can be quite painful; however, they assist the body to adapt to not being pregnant by squeezing out any remaining blood and lining in your uterus. This bleeding, which is called lochia, is like a period at first and may last for four to five days or slightly longer. The blood gradually changes from being bright red to a rusty brown; after that the lochia gets pale and pink or yellowish. Some women bleed on and off for six weeks or even longer. The quicker your uterus tightens up the sooner the lochia stops.

After lying down for a rest, or when you wake in the morning, some blood will have collected and clotted; therefore, there will be a sudden blood loss after resting, but this is nothing to worry about. These clots can be anything from the size of a small coin to big blobs the size of a tomato and might also come out when you breastfeed. This is normal. However, a gush of heavy bleeding more than 24 hours after childbirth is called a secondary post-partum haemorrhage. If you soak more than three sanitary pads in an hour you must let your nurse or physician know. Furthermore, do not use tampons while the lochia is still red! It is also recommended that women not use tampons at all in the first few months following childbirth.

A few days after the birth, the uterus is greatly reduced in size. The period when the uterus

is returning to its pre-pregnancy size lasts for about six weeks, or longer depending whether or not you experienced a traumatic delivery. The uterus will, however, always remain slightly larger than before and the opening from the vagina to the cervix will also be wider. The vagina may be more relaxed and the pelvic muscles may feel looser.

### Bust size

After the delivery of the placenta, production of the hormones progesterone and oestrogen is reduced, and the breasts start to change and secrete a fluid called colostrum (milk in its earliest form). The blood flow in the veins slows down so that the veins are clearly visible on the breasts. In around 24 hours the breasts can become very sensitive to the touch and by the third or fourth day milk is usually flowing quite easily. Due to hormones, women ultimately end up either smaller or larger when it comes to their bust. Go ahead and wear a push-up bra or strengthen the upper torso through weight lifting and still look just as gorgeous as before.

### Hip size

During pregnancy, your body adjusted by widening your hips as well as changing shape. The effect is that certain trousers may never

quite fit you again, and you might struggle with having more of a pear shape than an hourglass figure. Even though this might not be good news for you, it's all in how you look at it. If wide hips do become a permanent fixture, focus on slimming your legs and gluteus muscles. This will make you feel better about yourself, and might help you find new and flattering styles.



### Joints and bones

Hormones responsible for loosening the joints while pregnant may cause damage down the road for your body as it slowly reverses that process. Unfortunately, a woman's back, legs, and knees are very vulnerable after childbirth. Some women even develop chronic problems such as chipped tailbones, arthritis, or damaged vertebrae. Thus, do proceed carefully and gently in your everyday activities, and avoid

prolonged pressure on joints and bones. Also, regular visits to a good chiropractor might help.

### The nervous system

Due to different variables during pregnancy and the delivery (including the body's reaction to an epidural), numbness or tingling in the arms or legs and ongoing sciatic pains are

