Postpartum recovery checklist

Registries fill up with baby gear and forget the person who gave birth. This is the short list for your recovery: what to pack, what to keep by the toilet, what helps after a C-section, and our top-scored pick for each. Tick things off as you go.

Pack in your hospital bag (by 36 weeks)

Any birth

Postpartum underwear

Disposable or high-waisted underwear that holds a big pad and stays clear of a C-section incision. Hospitals give you mesh pairs; most people want something softer at home.

84 **Kindred Bravely underwear**
Top postpartum underwear · About $3...

Vaginal birth

Instant cooling pads

Cold eases swelling in the first day or two. Instant-ice pads need no freezer, so they work in the hospital and on the ride home.

76 **Frida Mom Instant Ice**
Our pick · About $20

Vaginal birth

An angled peri bottle

Rinse with warm water instead of wiping. The hospital one works, but an angled spout is easier to aim while you sit.

82 **Cynpel peri bottle**
Top peri bottle · About $9

If you breastfeed

A nursing bra

A soft, stretchy one with no underwire. Your size changes when your milk comes in, so don't buy a drawer full yet.

85 **Bravado Body Silk**
Top nursing bra · About $52

Any birth

Loose, high-waisted clothes for going home

Your belly takes weeks to shrink. Pack maternity clothes, with a soft waistband that sits above a C-section incision.

Your bathroom recovery station

Any birth

Postpartum pads

Bleeding lasts about 4 to 6 weeks after either kind of birth. Use thick pads for the first two weeks, then thinner ones. No tampons or cups until your provider says so.

82 **Curity maternity pads**
Top postpartum pad · About $11

Vaginal birth

A reusable cold pack

For the days after the instant pads run out. Use a cover and about 20 minutes at a time.

81 **Gentlepak perineal paks**
Top score · About $21

79 **Pariday TendHer**
Also great · About $35

Vaginal birth

Witch hazel pads

Pads like Tucks soothe stitches and hemorrhoids. Lay a few on top of your pad; some people keep them in the fridge or freezer.

Vaginal birth

A sitz bath

A shallow basin that sits on the toilet. Soak in 2 to 3 inches of warm water for 10 to 20 minutes, once or twice a day. Ask before adding salts if you have stitches.

Any birth

Ask about a stool softener

The first bowel movements can be scary after stitches or surgery. Many providers suggest a stool softener; ask yours which one is right for you before you leave the hospital.

If you have a C-section

C-section

- [ ] **A belly wrap or binder**

Many hospitals give you one. A wrap can make moving, coughing and laughing more comfortable. It should never stop you from taking a full breath, and it won't flatten your belly. Ask your provider first.

80 **Frida Mom binder**
Top belly wrap · About $30

C-section

- [ ] **High-waisted underwear**

A waistband that sits well above the incision so nothing rubs it while it heals.

84 **Kindred Bravely underwear**
Top score · About $37-43 for 5

C-section

- [ ] **A pillow to hold against your belly**

Press a pillow over the incision when you get up, cough or laugh. Any firm pillow works; no need to buy one.

C-section

- [ ] **A warm or cool pack**

A heating pad or a covered cold pack can ease soreness around the incision. Keep the incision itself clean and dry.

79 **Pariday TendHer**
Our pick · About $35

Pelvis and core

Any birth

- [ ] **A pelvic support belt, if your pelvis hurts**

Pelvic or lower-back pain after birth is common. A belt worn low around the hips is one of the best-supported fixes, alongside physical therapy.

77 **Hip Bandit**
Our pick · About $40

80 **KeaBabies Revive**
Also great · About $37

Any birth

- [ ] **Ask about pelvic floor physical therapy**

Leaking, heaviness, pain with sex or pelvic pain that lasts past your checkup are worth a referral. A pelvic floor physical therapist treats exactly this.

Your feeding station

If you breastfeed

- [ ] **Nipple cream**

Soreness in the first week is common. If it keeps hurting, see a lactation consultant: pain usually means the latch needs help.

82 **Earth Mama nipple butter**
Top nipple cream · About $14 for 2 oz

If you breastfeed

- [ ] **Nursing pads**

Leaks are common once your milk comes in. Start with a small pack and see how much you leak.

82 **KeaBabies organic pads**
Top nursing pad · About $17

If you breastfeed

- [ ] **A silicone milk catcher**

Catch the milk the other side leaks while your baby feeds. It's an easy start to a freezer stash.

90 **Haakaa silicone pump**
Top milk catcher · About $13

If you breastfeed

- [ ] **A breast pump**

If you plan to pump, check your insurance first: most US health plans cover one.

89 **Spectra S1**
Top breast pump · Varies

If you breastfeed

- [ ] **A big water bottle and snacks within reach**

Feeding makes you thirsty. Keep a bottle with a straw and one-handed snacks where you feed.

Not on any registry, and more important

Any birth

- [ ] **Know the warning signs**

Call your provider or 911 for chest pain, trouble breathing, a severe headache or vision changes, a fever of 100.4°F or higher, soaking a pad in an hour or passing large clots, a red or swollen leg, or an incision that's getting redder or leaking. Say you recently gave birth.

Any birth

- [ ] **Help for how you feel**

Feeling sad, anxious or overwhelmed after birth is common, and help works. Call or text the National Maternal Mental Health Hotline at 1-833-852-6262, free and 24/7. Call 988 if you're in crisis.

Any birth

- [ ] **Plan for rest and help**

Line up meals, a helper for the first weeks, and who will take a night shift. No product does as much for your recovery as sleep and food.

This list is general information, not medical advice: follow your own provider's instructions, and call them with any worry. Picks are the highest Cradle Score in each category. As an Amazon Associate we earn from qualifying purchases.