

Postpartum Part I - Going to Town on the Vjayjay *1st baby

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This is the part that nobody *really* talks about. All the excitement and discussion usually focuses heavily on pregnancy and labor/delivery. You work your way up to the components of a beautiful classical piece and you get to the crescendo and its like aaahhhh the baby is born!!!! You really don't want to go back down again but you're wondering, wait, what just happened?

I don't think people deliberately avoid talking about it. I'm not about to so here's what happened specifically to *me* after Emmalyn was born. As I mentioned in my earlier account, there was some significant tearing during the last stages of pushing. Now, I don't remember specifically when and how the tears happened. All I do know is I was told to push as hard as I can for as long as I can, and I suspect that had something to do with it. I didn't actually feel the tearing happen. It's not like you cut your hand and you feel the cut. There are so many other sensations you are feeling that I would guess the tearing sensation is probably last on the pain runway. In light of that, you really shouldn't be afraid of the tear itself.

Anyone having a vaginal delivery is at risk for tears (epidural or not). There are ways you can minimize the risk especially if you start really early. I did a ton of kegel exercises so I guess that didn't help me. Perineal massage is also recommended but you must start in your first trimester and be really diligent about it throughout the pregnancy. I only found out about this in my third trimester, so it was too little too late for me. Some doctors and midwives are great at doing perineum massage during labor, especially the last part, in the hopes of minimizing tears. My doctor arrived too late to perform this for me, and I wasn't even sure if she would have done it. This has definitely changed my perspective about delivering with a OB and I am much more inclined to go with a midwife in the future. Heard from Dana that the midwives almost always perform the massage.

From my vague recollections, it is apparent that the tearing began at an early stage for me. Checked with my doula - and turns out I did start tearing before the baby crowned. This is not normal but I don't know what caused it. The nurse wasn't worried when it happened so I wasn't made aware of it. It was rated as a tear between 2nd and third level. So it almost tore up to the

anus, but not quite. Thank God. I'm not sure what the recovery would've been like. Right after the baby is born, the doctor starts assessing the tears (if you have any) and starts the process of sewing you up. I didn't have the pleasure of watching it, but I remembered holding Emmalyn in my arms, so full of joy, and yet feeling these excruciating sharp pains in my vagina area. The doctor asks me if I wanted some local anesthesia, I say yes please. She goes at it and i still feel the pain. She keeps increasing the anesthesia and i still feel it. Am I really just not cut out for pain meds? She suggests fentanyl to me at this point and I ask what will it do? The nurses tell me that it doesn't numb the pain but it makes me "calm" and "loopy" so maybe I pay attention less to the pain. I ask how long the procedure will take, they say "10 minutes". Since the local wasn't working as well for me, I say "hook me up" . In it goes into my system through hap-lock (i didn't want an IC) and I regret it instantly. I start to lose some 'grounding' and start to feel really high and floaty. The room is spinning around and I feel my whole body go limp. But what I wanted was to be rooted in the moment of being with my newborn daughter. Somehow the fentanyl made me want to let go of *all* my emotions, when I really wanted was just to pick and choose that one freaking annoying vagina sewing sensation. Too late. So yes it did help but not in the way I would have liked. I am one pain in the ass patient, aren't I? Impossible to please.

After they were done with the procedure, they do this really fun thing where they press down on your uterus to try and get as much blood (and your placenta) out. This is not fun. Yes, I'm on the fentanyl but I can feel it all. Having my baby on my chest forces me to stay calm. I don't want to scare Emmalyn so I put on a brave front and grit my teeth through it. (Although in hindsight, I'm sure she heard my hyena screams while she was battling her way through my cervix). This might be their pain management tactic, hoping the happy hormones will just overwhelm the pain sensations. It works regardless and I survive it.

They start talking about where my uterus is and how high up it is. There's a battle going on now for "prime real estate" in my abdomen area. Everyone wants a piece of it and apparently the bladder is the prime bidder right now. Not good, because it leaves the uterus high and dry. More poking and prodding on my abdomen area (thanks guys) continue. The nurse comes to me and says "you really need to pee, can you try?". Last thing on my mind really guys but I gave her the benefit of the doubt that this was important. I slowly get up and swing my legs over the stryker bed. Argh, blood everywhere. I try not to look and am thankful I don't have my glasses on but I see smashes of red everywhere. I also feel stuff dripping down my legs. I walk slowly over to the bathroom and as I squat down (again nobody warned me) on the toilet, I feel an excruciating pain at the anus. Oh yes, I just got sewn up down there. How did I forget? I bear the pain of the "stretching" of the stitches and try my best to pee. it's just not working. I feel like I don't have any control over my bladder. The bladder feels full but it doesn't feel connected to me. I try and try maybe for 10 minutes. They keep coming back to check up on me and still no progress. Finally, I call it quits and the nurse says we can try later. They clean me up using a

squirt bottle primarily and wipes. I really would have much preferred a shower but I am guessing that was too much work for them? They help me put on this wonderful soft and comfy mesh underwear that is layered with a chuck and two overlapping maternity pads. It's pretty much an adult diaper at this point.

"You're going to be bleeding for about 4-6 weeks okay?"

Argh. Need. More. Mesh. Underwear. *Update: Turns out they are washable so make sure you take them home with you so you can re-use them!

We all get prepped and rolled into the mother/baby ward. At this point, I am seriously exhausted. I really just want to pass out but I just had a baby! We just had a baby girl! I can't go to sleep! I need to hold her and examine every little single crevice of hers. I need to memorize her face, I need to read to her I just need to be in the moment with her. But I'm SO TIRED!

As I battle out these emotions, I meet our new nurse. She's great but informs us she's off duty in an hour. She looks through the doctor's notes and has established her number 1 priority is to make me pee. She asks me to go again, and I try and I try. Nothing. Meanwhile, I'm really suffering in that position on the toilet bowl feeling that awful stretching painful sensation on my perineum. She reads my mind.

"There's really no sense in making you suffer. Let's get you back in bed"

As I settle painfully back in bed, I wonder what her next step will be although at the back of my mind, I see the freaking catheter. She decides she'll give me a stomach scan and if it's over 400ml, she'll have to put a catheter in. I'm thinking in my head there's no way it would be over that. I mean where would it fit in my body? She wheels the machine in and starts scanning.

"You have over 1 liter of urine in your bladder. It's no wonder your uterus is up here (like near my boob) and can't make it way down. Sorry, I'm going to have to put a catheter in"

I quickly concluded there was no point fighting this. There's a reason why they have to do this and I just can't pee. I try to put everything in perspective. I just pushed a baby out that is probably 100x the diameter of a catheter. I should be able to handle the catheter no problem. She brings her stuff back into the room and I'm asked to open my legs, knees dropped to the side. Mikee comes over and holds my hands. I won't lie, it hurt. It was uncomfortable but nothing like labor. Once she gets it in, the pee just starts draining. It takes all of 10 minutes to get most of my pee out. She scans me again and still sees lots of pees so I am asked to stand up, so gravity can help get the pee out. Argh. Seriously? I comply, mentally reminding myself that

this is nothing compared to labor. I lie back down after it drains and they start poking my uterus again. And just like magic, the uterus starts to claim its rightful spot in my body. She's so happy that she completed this task before she got off shift. Kudos to her. I really liked her, but I never saw her again in the next three days.

They continue to monitor me regularly every 4-6 hours. Every nurse pretty much saw all of my privates and had touched my breasts plenty (to help in lactation). It's all valid though. They do stuff like check my vitals, check my stitches, poke my uterus to make sure it's as hard as a "walnut", examining my anus to make sure there are no hemorrhoids. I have completely lost all sense of modesty throughout this process. The good news is that there wasn't any more bad news. There were no signs of infection and the tears seemed to be 'healing nicely'. My final check-out nurse was soooooo excited at how well the stitches were healing that she asked if I wanted to see it. I said no (politely). And then she asked Mikee if he would like to see it, and I was like WHAT? ARE YOU CRAZY? HELL NO (not very politely).

We are home now. The pain in the vjayjay gets better each day. Peeing is slowly starting to feel normal again. I also was finally able to take a dump on Day 4 (oh yeah did I mention, pooing is impossible the first few days) which was an excruciating effort. I've never been constipated in my life ever, so this was a new sensation for me. I am so thankful to Mikee to asking every nurse for a supply of mesh underwear. They are so comfy!

I continue to bleed, it's normal, but I do notice the bleeding has lessened considerably. I take my friends' advice and use the baby mama spray and the tucks witch hazel pads. They do provide good relief. Also comforted to know that this healing is NORMAL. I do get the occasional cramps but I've been on ibuprofen so I think it helps keep it at bay. I have not had to go up to vicodin thankfully so it's suffice to say that everything is manageable at this stage.

I still don't have the guts to look down there with a mirror. Maybe I will when the doctor has declared it healed. She tells me that this makes me less likely to tear should I labor again. It makes absolutely no sense to me. I do not believe her. You should not believe her.

Remember that this **does not** happen to everyone (the tearing that is). In fact, different people go through different types of funky recoveries and some just have amazing recoveries in general. I hope you're one of the lucky ones and if not, it's all worth it! Just look at her!



15 day postpartum update:

It's been more than two weeks since the birth of Emmalyn. I'm happy to announce that I have healed pretty nicely. My pooping capabilities are now at 80% (i.e. still feel constipated 20% of the time). The vaginal bleeding is now down to a very light period so that's great news. The bleeding is supposed to go on for 4-6 weeks so I am thankful for where I'm at the two week mark. Also thrilled to discover (thanks Mikee!) that the Mesh underwear is washable!!! All I do is throw it in a lingerie bag to protect it during wash. Also line dry, no machine dry!

Still do not have the guts to put a mirror down there so I'll wait for our 6 week checkup for the OB to give an assessment on the healing of the tears. I no longer need to sit on a donut and am pretty much back at 100% physically. We've even started to take afternoon walks with the ladybug in her bassinet. She loves being snug as a bug while we go on the strolls. I think I'm going to start exercising again soon. Will see how my body responds to kettlebells since that is something easy I can do indoors. Meanwhile, did I already mention, all this is worth it???