

THE POSTPARTUM PERIOD

The postpartum period is a time to rest, recover and get to know your baby. The most important tasks are to take care of yourself, establish breastfeeding and adjust to the changes in your family. **When we call to see how you are doing please ensure you call us back promptly if you do not answer your phone.**

Rest and Sleep

Make rest a priority. You will not get enough sleep at night so you must plan to nap at least once each day. Or, as the saying goes “sleep when the baby sleeps”. A new mother often has very high energy and does not feel tired after a birth. This is because of all the hormones your body has released to provide you with enough energy for the hard work of childbirth. During the 24 – 48 hours following birth these hormones pass from your system and then you can feel very tired, and exceptionally so if you have not taken the time to rest. Remember sleep deprivation is cumulative and it may be several weeks if not months before you sleep longer than a four hour stretch. Do not expect one good stretch of sleep to shift things back to “normal”. Normal has changed; your life, your routine, and the way you arranged your activities is different now. Arrange for help with meals, household chores and the care of other children. The more rest you get in the first weeks, the sooner you will be able to resume your normal routine. Limit the number of visitors and the time they spend visiting in the first week. You will be surprised how tiring a few visitors can be. Accept any offers and ask visitors for help, don’t wait on them! Your job is to get to know and care for your baby.

Activities

Resumption of normal activity is mostly a matter of common sense. Work into activity slowly, stopping if you tire. Do not rush your postpartum recovery. Take at least ten days to nest and have a “babymoon”. Moderate exercise, such as walking, is beneficial and a good way to begin.

Good nutrition and adequate fluids

These are essential to successful breastfeeding and a speedy recovery. Always have a glass of water beside you when you nurse. You will likely feel quite thirsty anyway. You need to drink about 1.5 - 2 litres of water per day and eat about 2000 calories. If you find it hard to get to meals, ask for help and ensure you have nutritious snacks, fruits and vegetables on hand.

Emotions

It is not unusual to feel tired, a little letdown or weepy a day or two after giving birth. This is mostly due to the hormonal shifts taking place not to mention a little sleep deprivation. Relax, have a quiet day, and let the feelings flow; they will likely pass within 24 hours. However, if you feel overwhelmed, depressed, or unable to cope, call your midwife right away.

POSTPARTUM CARE OF THE MOTHER

FLOW

Your Flow (Lochia) should be similar to a heavy menstrual period. It will be heaviest in the first 24 hours after giving birth, and will lessen over the next few days. Over the first few days it will change from bright red to brownish-red, then over the next few weeks to pink, then yellow. Normal lochia may last from one to six weeks. Occasionally large clots are passed (size of an egg or even a small apple) in the first few postpartum days. If flow is normal and uterus is firm following, this is no cause for alarm. Check your uterus for firmness at least twice a day for the first few days. If your flow reappears, increases or becomes red again after the first week or so you are probably doing too much!

KEY POINTS

- **If you soak one pad completely in less than 20 minutes, page the midwife immediately, then**
- **Check the fundus to see if it is firm, if not, massage until it feels firm, like a grapefruit, and**
- **Check to see if you need to empty your bladder.**
- **Call the midwife if your flow develops a strong/bad odour and**
- **if your flow increases and continues at an increased rate, soaking whole pads call the midwife**

UTERUS

In the first few days after birth your uterus should feel firm, about the size of a grapefruit, with the fundus (top edge) at or below the level of your navel. It will shrink down (involute) about a finger breadth each day and by the end of the second week you will not be able to feel it from the outside by pressing on your abdomen. Most women who have given birth previously will experience “after pains,” contractions of the involuting uterus, especially when the baby nurses. These afterpains usually do not last more than 2-3 days and often cease when the milk comes in.

KEY POINTS:

- **If your uterus feels tender or painful, call the midwife.**
- **Check your uterus for firmness and position; if it is high or off to one side - is your bladder full?**
- **Take Ibuprofen and or Tylenol Extra Strength or for after-pains.**

INFECTION PREVENTION

Infection prevention is important. Hand washing is important it is the best way to prevent transmission of bacteria. Do it often! Remind other family members or visitors to wash their hands before holding the baby. Report to us any rise in your temperature above 100 F or 37.8 C. Occasionally there is a temporary rise in temperature when the milk comes in but this should fall within 12 hours.

KEY POINTS:

- **Handwashing is the best way to prevent infection.**
- **If you feel unwell, take your temperature.**
- **If temperature is above 37.8 C (100 F), call the midwife.**

PERINEUM

Your perineum may be tender for a few days. Use your plastic peri bottle every time you go to the bathroom. Fill with warm water and spray over your perineum after urinating then just dab with toilet paper. In the initial days spray before you pass urine as well. If you have had stitches or have a small tear, take at least 1 sitz bath a day. Make time for this! Soak in a clean tub filled with several inches of warm water, or use a portable sitz bath. You may add calendula or comfrey tinctures to this bath, since these herbs are known to promote wound healing. Some women like to use Epsom Salts. After your sitz bath, expose your perineum to the air, lie down on a towel without a pad or underwear for half an hour or try a hand-held hair dryer on a warm setting for a few minutes. The normal healing process for stitches will progress from feeling tender to slightly itchy.

*In the initial week following the birth try to limit sitting to nursing and mealtimes. Sitting puts pressure on the perineum so at other times lie down and put your feet up. When you get out of bed or out of a car keep your knees together and move your legs as a unit. Also minimize the amount of stair climbing and do not sit cross-legged. If your perineum is aching, you have probably been on your feet too long at one time and need to rest.

KEY POINTS:

- **Remember to use the peri bottle all the time**
- **Open labia and spray all around**
- **Dab with toilet tissue, don't wipe**
- **Change pads frequently, especially in hot weather**
- **Expose your perineum to air twice a day if possible**
- **Sitz baths are available for the toilet, otherwise, use the bathtub**
- **Initially, in the first 24 hours, ice packs may help**
- **If you are on your feet or sitting too much, your perineum may become swollen and more tender.**
- **If your perineum becomes painful, call the midwife.**
- **Start Kegel exercises as soon as possible and do them often**

BOWELS & BLADDER

Urinating may sting for a couple of days even if you do not have stitches. Try pouring warm water over your pubis and perineum with the peri bottle prior to beginning to void. If you are unable to empty your bladder at any time, call us.

Bowel movements often do not resume until 2-3 days after birth. To help keep bowels moving and stools soft, eat plenty of high roughage foods such as raw fruits and vegetables and whole grains or a big raisin bran muffin!. Prune juice can be helpful. Drink 8-10 glasses of water each day. Witch Hazel is a good remedy for hemorrhoids. Soak gauze pads with it and apply directly to the affected area, under your sanitary pad. You can buy pre-moistened pads (Tucks) at the drugstore.

KEY POINTS:

- **If you cannot empty your bladder or if you have pain after urinating, call the midwife.**
- **Drink plenty of water.**
- **Increase Fibre in your diet or try a glass of prune juice each day.**
- **Witch Hazel compresses for hemorrhoids.**
- **If you haven't had a bowel movement after 3 days, ensure the midwife knows.**

BREASTS

Most nipple soreness is due to incorrect positioning of the baby at the breast. Take your time to get comfortable, ensure you have enough pillows, good back support, maybe a footstool. Ensure that the baby is well positioned with his/her cheek resting on the breast. Wait until baby turns to the nipple and baby's mouth is wide open so they can grasp the entire nipple and a good portion of the areola, especially at the bottom. Hold the baby close to your body, bring the baby to the breast and let the baby 'take the breast'. Don't be too directive and try to stuff the breast in the baby's mouth. Do not continue to nurse if the nipple feels "pinched".

Air-dry your nipples often and rub a little breast milk onto your nipples after each nursing. It is not necessary to wash your nipples with anything but warm water.

Check your breasts once a day to identify any tender areas or lumps.

Be sure to call us with any breastfeeding questions or problems. If you are having difficulties do not try to tough it out, we can likely make it easier. See breastfeeding handouts for more breastfeeding information.

KEY POINTS:

- **Take time to get in a good, comfortable position for nursing**
- **Be patient about getting a good latch, let baby "take the breast"**
- **Do not nurse with an uncomfortable latch, or on very sore nipples**
- **If you have a hot, red, tender area or a tender lump on your breast, call the midwife**
- **Call us early with breastfeeding difficulties**