

POST-PARTUM INSTRUCTIONS * CARE OF MOTHER AND BABY

Each labor and birth are unique and so are the recuperation periods after each birthing. Many things will affect how fast and how well you return to a state of energy and health relatively comparable to your pre-pregnant situation. Some of those things include the length and discomfort of your labor, whether or not you required stitches, whether or not you had to go to the hospital, for you or to check the baby, how much sleep you lost, how your baby sleeps and eats, the needs of siblings if you have other children, your state of health - both physical and emotional. And, a lot depends on how supportive and helpful your mate or closest friend is being. This is a time when you can benefit by some good "mothering".

I encourage all new mothers to take a two week break from all regular work/chores. Good planning before the birth can eliminate the need for you to have to do housework, shopping, heavy cooking, etc. Make arrangements to shift these chores to others temporarily.

DURING THE FIRST 3 TO 4 DAYS, YOUR ACTIVITIES SHOULD INCLUDE (BASICALLY) ONLY THE FOLLOWING:

Take at least one sitz bath per day. 1/2 c. sea salt plus lavender/herbs to one full pan or bathtub of fairly hot water and sit for 5 minutes. Drink aloe vera juice to speed healing.

Shower with someone near you in case you feel faint the 1st time.

Take your temperature if you are not feeling well and report any significant elevation to your care provider. Temperature will probably go up for a day or so when your milk comes in. That is normal. Any other rise in temperature may indicate an infection.

Massage your uterus like your nurse has shown you, if you suddenly feel a gush of blood. You can do this often the first couple of days to keep the uterus firm and well contracted so that blood loss should be minimal (like a normal period).

Care for your breasts and perineum by keeping them dry and exposed to air and sunshine if possible. Both your nipples and your bottom can be covered in Vitamin E oil, or certain herbs to prevent or treat soreness. If you experienced a tear, do not spread your legs far apart, as this may dislodge stitches.

Eat frequent nutritious meals and drink 12 - 14 glasses of water daily. Continue your supplements, especially iron, if you have been taking them. Concentrate on a high protein, hi-bulk diet, with plenty of fruits and vegetables. You should urinate within 12 hours and have a BM within 24 - 48 hours.

Care for your baby - nursing, holding, changing diapers, dressing and cleaning the cord. With sterile cotton balls or q-tips and alcohol/golden seal powder completely clean around the cord stub 4 times per day. Gently pull the stub up to clean in and under all crevices.

STRONGLY RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO GET UP AND DO TOO MUCH TOO SOON. After just doing the previous list for the first few days, from 4th day on, you can sit propped up on the couch part of the day and begin to be up for meals if you feel up

to it. By the second week, you can resume some activities around the house but you should avoid fatigue, lift nothing heavy, and take 3 good rest periods or naps each day, while your baby sleeps. Go to bed early and wake late so that you are getting 8 to 10 hours of sleep, not counting the time you are awake for feedings. If this seems like a lot of pampering, keep in mind that it took your body 9 months to build up to birth, and it will be producing the only food your baby consumes for at least the next few months. If you will take TWO WEEKS to really rest, you will return to your normalcy much faster in the long run. Women who become exhausted or who think that they should "get back to work" are usually the ones who experience the most problems with illness and/or emotional depression after childbirth. The phenomenal growth of pregnancy, the work of labor and birth, the new hormones in your body and the missed sleep of nursing and child care all deserve to be respected.

IF YOU HAVE STITCHES. It is important that you keep your bottom as clean and dry as possible. Take your sitz baths, spray the warm-hot salty water all over your bottom, pat dry with a clean towel and apply an anti-biotic or anti-septic cream to the stitched area. An herbal compress can work, too. After the 3 to 5 days, you need to do nothing other than bathing the area several times a day, unless you still have a lot of soreness. **PERINEAL CARE:** Begin kegel exercises as soon as possible after the birth. Start off by just doing 2 or 3 mild kegels and work your way back up to 200 per day by the end of your 2 week postpartum vacation. You can make cool compresses out of Maxi pads dampened with witch hazel or aloe vera and put in freezer prior to your birth, then apply to your perineum for 10-20 minutes at a time if you are swollen and uncomfortable. Warmth is recommended by Chinese doctors to speed healing, use a hot water bottle, heating pad wrapped in a chucks or something like that. By 2nd day postpartum, you can go without a pad as much as possible to keep the area well aired out and dry. Lie on a chucks or underpaid and expose area to a little sunlight if possible.

IF YOU HAVE SORE NIPPLES. It is important to get help if you are experiencing more than just a tenderness. It is likely that the baby's "latch" is not quite right. La Leche League is a learning and support group that meets once a month for free at Kaisier and a Certified Lactation Consultant can visit your home for a fee. Some knowledge before hand, and a good breastfeeding book can help to avoid difficulties.

DANGER SIGNALS IN THE MOTHER:

Hemorrhage is the major risk for the mother after childbirth. Your nurse will assess your condition and will watch for any bleeding up to 3 hours after birth. If, after you return home, you begin to soak maxi pads and a rate of 1 per 15 minutes or faster, LIE DOWN and put a pillow under your hips, raising your uterus higher than your heart. Have someone massage your uterus firmly until you have contractions and your fundus firms up. If you do not think the bleeding has slowed to a normal flow within a few minutes, call your doctor. In any case of really excessive bleeding, go immediately to the hospital emergency room.

Fever, chills or other symptoms of illness may indicate a uterine or breast infection. Call your doctor. Do not let an infection go unattended.

Redness or swelling on your legs or in your groin must be checked. As well as anything your intuition tells you is not working right.

DANGER SIGNALS IN THE BABY:

Immediately call pediatrician if you observe your newborn having any of these signs of difficult breathing:

Grunting- noisy respiration upon breathing out with each breath.

Retractions- the baby's skin will pull inward between and below the ribs with each breath, and the baby seems to be working hard to breathe.

Flaring nostrils- outward movement of the nostrils at every inspiration.

Continuously rapid or labored breathing (over 40-60 per minute)

Apnea- baby stops breathing for 10-15 seconds or longer.

The above 5 symptoms may occur together or separately. All of them are causes for concern. Call your doctor. If baby should stop breathing, flick the feet and massage vigorously. CALL AMBULANCE PERFORM GENTLE MOUTH TO MOUTH RESUSCITATION.

If you observe any of these,

Cyanosis- blueness around the lips. Go to hospital.

Convulsions- jerking, twitching, eyes roll back in head. Report to pediatrician.

Tremors and jitteriness. Report to pediatrician.

Extreme lethargy and abnormally difficult to arouse. Report to pediatrician.

No meconium or urine for 24 hours, or brick colored or blood stained stools.

Especially if baby seems to be in pain or has a distended stomach. Go to hospital or doctor.

Pale, unusually sweaty baby. Report to pediatrician.

Projectile vomiting. Report to pediatrician.

Bleeding at cord site or anywhere. If more than a few drops go to emergency room.

Jaundice- a yellow tint to the skin, especially noticeable across the nose, under the eyes, in the whites of the eyes and across the chest. Many babies become jaundiced between 3rd and 5th day of life. If your baby becomes jaundiced in the first 2 days or after the 5th day, report it to your pediatrician. If baby becomes bright yellow or orange, have pediatrician to a blood test to determine the amount of bilirubin built up in the baby's system.

Thick pus-like discharge from baby's eyes, with redness and swelling. Have it checked immediately.

A lot of redness surrounding baby's cord stump. Have it seen immediately.