

POSTPARTUM INSTRUCTIONS

Congratulations on the birth of your child! The following information is intended to provide you with some general information and guidelines regarding the postpartum period. Questions concerning these guidelines or modifications for your particular situation should be discussed with your obstetrician.

General Activity

In general, it takes six weeks for your body to return to "normal". For the first two weeks after delivery, try to get some rest each day. Avoid strenuous work, heavy lifting and excessive social activities. Gradually, you may increase your activity. After the second week, you should get away for some light recreation, such as dinner or a movie.

You may go up and down stairs at your normal pace if it is comfortable. Let your body be your guide. If necessary, move slowly and take your time. Hold on to the wall or banister if needed.

After a vaginal delivery, you may drive a car when it feels comfortable to sit in a chair and move your arms and legs to simulate the movements of driving. You should also wait until you have discontinued pain medications. After an uncomplicated cesarean section with a transverse incision ("bikini cut"), you should wait a minimum of one week after delivery to drive a car. You should also be off of pain medications and feel comfortable performing all of the movements needed to drive.

It is usually possible to return to ordinary employment about six weeks after your baby is born. If you plan to return to work sooner, please consult first with your obstetrician.

Cesarean Section

Unless otherwise instructed, cesarean section patients should follow the same instructions as those having a vaginal delivery except that exercises should not be done without the approval of your doctor. The abdominal incision may occasionally drain a small amount of yellow or red fluid. A warm pack or hot water bottle may be used on the area several times daily. If the incision becomes unusually sore, red and inflated, if you have a fever greater than 100 degrees Fahrenheit or if the drainage appears more than minimal (over 1 teaspoon), notify your physician.

Bathing

You may shower or wash your hair at any time you desire. You should defer tub baths (other than Sitz baths) and swimming for at least four weeks. Also, wait until the bleeding stops.

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Stitches

By the time you go home, your stitches should not be too uncomfortable. If needed, relief may be obtained by soaking in shallow tub baths for 10 to 20 minutes at a time. Leave the water running and drain open. This is a Sitz bath. Do not use soap. Repeat two times daily as desired. Tuck's pads may be soothing. Use your peri bottle from the hospital and continue to rinse your stitches with warm water each time you use the bathroom. To keep from getting bacteria from the rectum to the birth canal or stitches, always wipe from front to back, wiping only once with each tissue. Make sure you use a clean sanitary pad each time you go to the bathroom, even if your pad is only slightly soiled.

Hemorrhoids

Hemorrhoids that appear for the first time in late pregnancy or as a result of delivery will usually resolve and disappear by your six week follow-up appointment. They may also respond well to Sitz baths. Stool softeners can be an effective form of treatment as they allow your bowel movements to be more regular and subsequently may decrease your straining. The straining may slow the involution of the hemorrhoids. Local medications such as Preparation-H or Anusol may be used.

Constipation

Following delivery you may become constipated. To make sure that your stools are soft, drink plenty of fluids (including juices) and eat fruits, vegetables and bran cereals to put roughage (bulk) into your diet. Your doctor may suggest stool softeners or laxatives if necessary. Contact your doctor if you have not had a bowel movement by the third day following delivery.

Vaginal Discharge

Vaginal bleeding may persist as heavy as a normal menses for three to four weeks after delivery and occasionally longer. It may increase for the first few days at home and may vary throughout the day. At first it will be bright red, changing gradually so that by about ten days following your baby's birth it will turn pink in color. It may have a slight odor. Vaginal bleeding usually disappears by six weeks. Sometimes, with excessive activity, it may return to a red color for several days. Nursing may cause increased bleeding as it causes the uterus to contract. Do not use tampons, douches or period cups.

Menstruation

The return of menstruation after delivery is quite variable. Nursing mothers may start their first menses within the first eight weeks or may not begin until three months after nursing has stopped. Non-nursing mothers usually start within the first eight weeks. The first menses may be very abnormal (unusually heavy, light, long or short). Remember, the possibility of conception exists any time after childbirth, whether or not the menses have reappeared and whether or not you are breastfeeding.

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Sexual Intercourse

Sexual intercourse should be avoided until after your first postpartum visit with your doctor. You and your doctor should discuss contraception options at that time as well as an appropriate time to resume sexual intercourse.

Breast Care

If any area of either breast becomes red, warm and tender, or if you have a fever, notify your physician.

If you are nursing there are several things to remember to make the process easier. The baby typically will nurse every two to four hours. They will need to feed at least every five hours, even if you have to wake them up from a nap (not necessarily at night). Your baby may not eat the same amount at every feeding, so some feedings may be better than others. The breasts work in the supply and demand principle, so nursing and sucking are important to stimulate milk production. The amount of time spent feeding on each breast should gradually increase to 15 to 20 minutes per breast at each feeding. By alternating the breast you start with each feeding, the supply will be more even with less chance of sore nipples. Expect several days until your milk comes in. During your hospital stay, you are encouraged to have a nurse watch you feed the baby to offer suggestions for improvement in technique.

If you are bottle feeding, put on a supportive bra as soon as possible after your baby is born. Breast movements stimulate milk production rather than suppress it. Wear your bra 24 hours a day until your breasts return to normal size. Change your bra daily and as needed. If your breasts begin to fill with milk, you may get some relief with ice packs on your breasts. Do not try to force milk out of the breast by squeezing them. This may give you temporary relief but will also stimulate more milk production, thereby prolonging the problem. Remember this: Any kind of stimulation may encourage the breasts to produce more milk. When showering, avoid having the water spray directly on the breasts and avoid hot water to the breasts. Move slowly up and down stairs to avoid bouncing and stimulation.

Diet

Unless otherwise instructed, eat a regular diet. Any special dieting instructions will be given individually if necessary.

Medications

Continue your prenatal vitamins and/or iron pills until your six week check-up. Nursing mothers should continue the prenatal vitamins until they stop nursing. Calcium supplements are also important in breastfeeding mothers and 1000 mg supplemental calcium is recommended following delivery. This may be achieved with milk, dairy products or calcium pills. Your doctor may instruct you on additional medication that may be necessary.

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Water Retention

Swelling of the hands, legs and feet may be noticed for several weeks following delivery and is usually self-limiting.

Abdominal Support and Exercise

Exercise in the postpartum period is an important component of your overall well-being and recovery. Walking allows you to maintain muscle tone as well as gives you an opportunity to get outside for some fresh air each day. Exercises to tighten the abdominal musculature such as sit-ups or leg raises are also recommended unless you have had a cesarean section. Let your own body guide you as to when you may begin and how extensively you should exercise. Remember, too much too early should be avoided so DO NOT push yourself if your body is not ready. DO NOT exercise to exhaustion.

Kegel Exercises

It is important to start perineal exercises (kegels) soon after a vaginal delivery. This may help you regain some of your pelvic muscle tone. It is done by simulating the starting and stopping of the flow of urine, thus tightening the muscles of the pelvis. Do these 50 times at least four times per day.

Postpartum Blues

Sometimes after delivery one can experience a vague unhappiness with feelings of depression and crying. This can occur without obvious cause and is almost always temporary. If there seems to be unusual persistence of depression or any other emotional reaction, notify your doctor.

Postpartum Medical Care

Please contact the office soon after delivery in order to make an appointment for your six week postpartum visit. At that time you will be examined and instructions will be provided on family planning and/or contraception, activities, etc. If you had a cesarean section, you should also schedule an additional appointment to be seen in the office approximately two to three weeks following delivery.

After You Leave the Hospital

Call your doctor if you have:

- a. A fever or severe chills.
- b. Excessive or prolonged bleeding.
- c. Any other problems that may cause concern.

Congratulations again and good luck on your new family addition! This is an extremely exciting time in your life and we are happy to have had the opportunity to share it with you.