

## Postpartum Instructions

### Postpartum Care

Postpartum is the time period after the delivery of your baby. During this time you will experience many changes- physically, mentally, and emotionally. Usually the first six weeks after delivery are the most difficult. Your body will be adapting to no longer being pregnant. During this time, it is important to rest and gradually return to your normal activities as recommended by your doctor. You will want to make arrangements for someone to help you at home for the first few days to weeks after delivery. You will need to schedule a postpartum check-up for six weeks after delivery.

### Bleeding & Cramping

You will have bleeding like a heavy period for the first several days after delivery. Many women will have bleeding or spotting for as long as six weeks after delivery. Some will experience cramping after delivery (afterbirth pains). This cramping is caused by the tightening of the uterus which slows down your bleeding and helps your uterus gradually return to normal size. It is normal for postpartum mothers to feel more cramping while breastfeeding because of hormones that are released during nursing. If you are not breastfeeding, your menstrual period may return a few weeks after delivery. If breastfeeding, your periods may not return for several months, but you may still ovulate. This means that you can still get pregnant even though you are not having periods. Avoiding sex and tampon use is advisable until after your postpartum examination. During your six-week postpartum visit, your provider will help you to decide on an appropriate method of birth control.

### Perineal Pain

Your perineum, the area between your vagina and rectum, may be very tender after delivery. The tissue stretches during delivery to allow for passage of the baby. Sometimes your perineum will tear or you may have an *episiotomy*. An *episiotomy* is an incision made in the perineum during a vaginal delivery to widen the area for passage of the baby's head from the birth canal. After delivery, your perineum may feel numb at first. When the numbness wears off, you will feel very sore like you are bruised or swollen in the genital area. Warm water sprayed from a water bottle can help to cleanse and soothe this area during and after urination. Perineal cold packs, witch hazel pads, steroid foam, and anesthetic spray may be applied to ease your discomfort. You may also want to sit on a pillow or cushion after delivery if you are uncomfortable when sitting. Soaking in a warm tub of water (sitz bath) several times per day will also help to ease your discomfort and promote faster healing in the perineal area.

## **Postpartum Instructions (Cont'd)**

### **Swelling**

Swelling is very common during the postpartum period. Swelling usually gets worse during the first postpartum week and will gradually improve with time after delivery. You should try to increase your water intake which will help your body to release extra fluid from swelling. It is important for you to walk and move around after delivery to prevent complications like blood clots, but try not to overdo your activity. Raising or elevating your legs will also help to decrease swelling.

### **Hemorrhoids**

Hemorrhoids are sore swollen tissue and veins in the rectal area. If you had hemorrhoids prior to delivery they may be worse after you have the baby. Women who did not have hemorrhoids before delivery will often develop them after pushing at the time of birth. Sitz baths, medicated sprays or creams, and chilled witch hazel compresses can help with the discomfort of hemorrhoids. Drink plenty of water and eat fiber-rich foods to help avoid constipation which can make hemorrhoid pain worse. Also remember to continue your stool softeners when you get home from the hospital. Usually hemorrhoids resolve on their own. If you have excessive bleeding or pain from your hemorrhoids, you should notify your doctor.

### **Mood swings**

As you are adjusting to the many changes after the delivery of your baby, you will often experience mood swings. Most women experience feelings of sadness. This is sometimes known as “baby blues or postpartum blues” and may affect seventy to eighty percent of mothers. Usually the symptoms are mild and gradually get better as mothers get adjusted during the first few weeks of the postpartum period. Sometimes, women experience more severe, long-lasting mood fluctuations which may progress to postpartum depression. Postpartum depression is a very serious condition that happens in about ten percent of new mothers who have very intense feelings of anxiety, severe despair, and/or hopelessness. If you are experiencing severe mood symptoms you should notify your doctor as soon as possible.

## Postpartum Instructions (Cont'd)

### What is not normal?

- Persistent heavy bleeding with large clots
- Nausea and vomiting
- Severe lower abdominal pain
- Fever greater than 100.4 F
- Pain or burning with urination
- Pain, excessive swelling, tenderness in legs
- Chest pain, coughing with shortness of breath
- Foul smelling vaginal discharge
- Redness, discharge from episiotomy or abdominal incision
- Separation of episiotomy or incision site
- Red streaks or painful lumps in your breasts
- Persistent pain or worsening pain in perineum or around incision
- Postpartum depression
- Extreme mood swings with persistent, worsening feelings of hopelessness, or wanting to hurt yourself, your baby, or someone else.
- If you experience any of these symptoms, you should call your doctor as soon as possible because they could signs of serious health problems.