Postnatal Wellbeing

Postnatal wellbeing

- Postnatal = period of time after the birth of your child
- For your health and wellbeing, it helps to know what to expect and some simple ways that you can care for yourself to aid your recovery.

Statistics

- The average age of first-time mothers in Australia is 29.4 years
- In 2018, 30.1% of first births were caesarean sections (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020)

Conversation Starters & interactive activities

- Ask your group what they expect/expected after birth, ask if anyone has already been through this time and if they would like to share something from their own experience, perhaps some comparisons they have noticed between here and their home country.
- Ask your group how they think they could help someone suffering from postnatal depression
- Introduce the group to ‘mind mum’ app and/or smiling mind app, evidence-based apps to support emotional health and wellbeing in the peripartum period.

NOTE: Relevant activities and conversation starters can also be found in the ‘Incontinence’ Topic Template

Immediately after birth

- Vaginal birth
  - Rest (lying on side), ice & compression applied to the perineum can help reduce pain & swelling
  - Perineal trauma - stitches may be required if there are tears, these will dissolve
  - Pelvic floor muscle weakness is common but should improve in the first 3 months post birth, if continues, seek help from GP or specialised physiotherapist)
- Caesarean section
  - What to expect – will have a scar & stitches (most dissolve), about 6 weeks for it to heal
  - You may have attempted a vaginal birth – rest, ice and compression as above may also be beneficial
  - Usually 6 weeks before driving
Avoid lifting anything heavier than baby for 6 weeks!

- Length of stay in hospital will depend on your condition. Typically, the same day or next day for an uncomplicated birth and up to 3 days for a caesarean.
- Maternal Health nurse will visit you at intervals in coming weeks starting from a couple of days after getting home.

What to expect

- Breasts:
  - Difference between colostrum and mature milk (which usually comes in around 60 hours after the birth)
  - “After pains” due to hormones associated with breastfeeding, usually with 2nd or later pregnancies. These are uterine contractions occurring with breastfeeding.
  - Complications: mastitis, breast/nipple thrush, low milk supply

- Vaginal discharge
  - Will settle over the first 4-6 weeks
  - When to seek medical advice – bleeding worsening, offensive smell etc

- Belly
  - Your uterus should reduce in size in the first few weeks after birth, breastfeeding helps with this
  - Abdominal muscle separation – usually improves within 12 weeks but can remain long term

- Bowel
  - Haemorrhoids: can be due to hormones and also pushing phase of labour
  - Bowel health: drink lots of water and eat high fibre food, don’t strain on the toilet
  - Safe to use your bowels, even if had stitches

- Urine
  - Incontinence is not uncommon after giving birth, even with caesarean births. Issues should resolve within 6 months of giving birth. (If not speak to your GP)
  - Pelvic floor exercises (see ‘Related Topics’)

- Exercise
  - Start with walking for first 12 weeks, gradually building up how long you walk for
  - Before returning to high impact exercise (after 12 weeks), test strength of pelvic floor (if you can
laugh, cough, jump with a full belly and no urine leakage, should be ok to exercise)

- **Sex**
  - Doctors often recommend waiting 4-6 weeks
  - Contraception – Important because can start ovulating again any time after giving birth
  
  **NOTE**: Breastfeeding does **not** protect from falling pregnant

**Breastfeeding**
- It is important to breastfeed your baby if you can because it:
  - Provides for all your baby’s nutritional needs for the first 6 months of life
  - Satisfies baby’s thirst and hunger
  - Increases baby’s resistance to infection and disease

- NOT breastfeeding increases the baby’s risk of SIDS, gastrointestinal, ear and chest infections and other conditions in premature babies

- NOT breastfeeding increases the mother’s risk of breast and ovarian cancer

- It can be difficult for some mums initially, but help is available – midwife, ABA, lactation consultant.

**Postnatal anxiety and depression**
- Affects 1 in 7 mums and 1 in 10 dads (most common after first pregnancy)
- Can last up to 12 months
- Difference between ‘baby blues’ and PND (baby blues usually last only a few days post birth)

- Some symptoms include (but not limited to): panic attacks, generalised worry, obsessive/compulsive thoughts, abrupt mood swings, constantly sad/low/crying, constantly tired or lacking energy, withdrawing from friends/family, easily annoyed or irritated, angry, difficult to focus/concentrate/remember things

**Take care of yourself**
- Be kind to yourself
- Talk to others about how you are feeling
- Have periods of time out, doing things you enjoy, (i.e. listening to music, having a bath, shopping or seeing a movie)
- Ask for / accept offers of practical help
- Regular exercise
- Eat a healthy diet and drink enough water
Sleep – regular bed time, avoid exercise/screen time/coffee/stimulating activities before bed, do something relaxing before bed, avoid napping in the evening

Where to seek help

- Your partner
- Family & friends
- Mother’s group
- Your doctor
- Professional counsellor
- Maternal and Child Health Line 13 22 29 (VIC), 1800 882 436 (NSW), 1300 808 178 (Tas)
- PANDA (Post and Antenatal Depression Association) helpline Tel. 1300 726 306 (Monday to Friday, 9 am to 7:30 pm AEST)
- Pregnancy, birth, baby website – initiative through Department of Health – fact sheets and can phone or video call a maternal child health nurse
- Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA) National Register (Family and Relationship Therapy) Tel. (03) 9486 3077
  - Call Telephone Interpreter Service FIRST on 13 14 50 and tell them you wish to call one of these hotlines

Resources

- Royal Women’s Hospital: What to expect after birth
  For additional information on this topic

- Australian Breastfeeding Association
  https://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/

  Multilingual resources:
  https://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/bf-info/other-languages

- Royal Women’s Hospital
  A variety of factsheet available in multiple languages
  https://www.thewomens.org.au/health-information/fact-sheets#

- PANDA (Post and Antenatal Depression Association)
  Translated factsheet: Anxiety and Depression in Pregnancy & early parenthood
  https://www.panda.org.au/awareness/resources
Factsheet: Wellbeing and Selfcare

- **BeyondBlue**

- **Mum Space**
  Evidence based support for new parents with e-CBT

**Related topics**
This section includes topic templates and resource boxes that may also be useful for this session. ...

**Topic templates:**
- Incontinence
- Women’s health
- Pregnancy

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1 Topic templates for Water Well sessions should be used as a guide only. They do not dictate what does or does not get covered in a session. When presenting information from the templates, it is important to consider if it is relevant to the specific group in your session. Be directed by the questions from the group. Questions often come up that you may not be sure about and are not in the topic template. In this case, it’s often useful to open the question up to the group for discussion and refer to other potential resources such as the local doctor, official website, etc. We are always trying to improve our topic templates and welcome any feedback via our feedback forms.