

As

the old saying goes, babies don't come with instruction manuals. Nor does childbirth automatically give a mom insight into what's happening to her own body. But that doesn't mean new parents have to be totally on their own. From Web sites to books, there's more information available than ever before; you just have to know where to look. To help you get through the first six weeks after giving birth, here's some expert obstetric and pediatric advice, as well as a guide to the best information and support sources out there.

[PART 1]

Taking care of baby

Bringing a baby home can be terrifying for first-time parents. However, as any experienced mom or dad will tell you, caring for a newborn is easier than it looks. Here's some soothing advice on caring for your baby from Gwenn O'Keeffe, M.D., a pediatrician at Harvard Vanguard Associates in Burlington, Mass., and a clinical instructor at Harvard Medical School in Cambridge, Mass.

Umbilical-cord stump Keep the area where the cord attaches to the belly as clean and dry as possible. Wipe it after every diaper change, using a cotton swab or ball dipped in alcohol. Then fold the front of the diaper down so it doesn't cover the stump. Stick with sponge baths until the umbilical cord drops off, usually in two to four weeks. If the area becomes red or pus-filled, call the doctor: Though rare, umbilical-site infections can be serious.

Circumcision site The area will be red and raw for a few days but should heal within a week. Your doctor probably will recommend applying a topical antibiotic ointment, such as Neosporin or bacitracin, or even plain petroleum jelly at each diaper change. If the site looks unusually swollen or red, seems warm or has pus on it, call your pediatrician immediately.

Crying spells "Babies cry," O'Keeffe says. "It's normal." So instead of panicking, go through a mental checklist of what could be wrong. Is he hungry? Cold? Poopy? Gassy? Hot? Lonely? Nursing, rocking, bouncing or walking with your baby often helps — but not always. "Some babies just have irritable temperaments," O'Keeffe says. And some have colic, a term that doctors define differently. Generally, a colicky baby is one who has long crying spells on a regular basis, usually every day at about the same time. Sometimes they have obvious gas pains during their crying spells.

the first six
Expert advice on taking care of yourself and

sometimes they don't. Doctors aren't sure what causes it, but rest assured that this, too, shall pass, usually by 4 to 6 months of age.

Bathing Stick with sponge baths until the umbilical cord stump drops off. Wrap the baby in a towel on a cushioned surface and wash him with a soft cloth using warm water only. Unwrap just the body part you're washing so he stays warm. After the stump is gone, you can put the baby in a baby tub or in a sink lined with towels to keep him from slipping. To prevent his skin from drying out, limit full baths to two or three times a week, and use only baby soap. Oils and lotions are unnecessary unless his skin is very dry; powder should be avoided since it's easily inhaled. Remember, newborns can get cold easily, so have all supplies and a warm towel ready before you start the bath.

Sleeping Unless your pediatrician recommends otherwise, place your newborn on his back, and only on firm surfaces. Keep him well away from pillows and fluffy blankets or toys that could suffocate him.



The umbilical cord stump will fall off in two to four weeks.

HOW TO PACK A DIAPER BAG



[When to call the pediatrician]

If you're not sure whether to call your baby's doctor, err on the side of caution, says Gwenn O'Keeffe, M.D. These symptoms should have you on the phone immediately:

FEVER Pediatricians are very cautious with any fever in a baby younger than 8 weeks, especially if his rectal temperature is higher than 100.5° F. They are less alarmed after 8 weeks, but if your baby has a fever, isn't eating well or just looks "sick," phone the doctor.

DRY DIAPERS Your baby should have eight to 12 wet diapers a day; if he doesn't, he may not be eating enough. (Breastfeeding mothers should be especially attentive during the first few days, when the milk is coming in.)

POOP PROBLEMS The consistency and color of poop can vary, so don't be alarmed if your baby's bowel movements change from day to day and week to week. But diarrhea can cause dehydration. Call your pediatrician if your baby has watery stools or blood in his diaper.

VOMITING Spitting up is normal, but if your baby vomits in large amounts or projectile vomits, or if his vomit is yellowish or greenish, his digestive tract could be blocked.

A WHITE TONGUE Babies are susceptible to a fungal infection known as thrush, which causes the tongue to look white. Call your pediatrician if you notice this. Thrush is treated with an oral antifungal medication and usually clears up within a week or two. If you're nursing and your baby develops thrush, you may develop it on your nipples.

SIGNS OF UMBILICAL-CORD INFECTION These include pus or redness around the stump area.

Resources for new-baby care

- *25 Things Every New Mother Should Know* by Martha Sears, R.N., with William Sears, M.D. (Harvard Common Press, 1995).
- *Growing Together: A Parent's Guide to Baby's First Year* by William Sears, M.D. (La Leche League International, 1998).
- *Caring for Your Baby and Young Child, Birth to Age 5* by Steven P.

Shelov, M.D., Robert E. Hannemann, M.D., and the American Academy of Pediatrics (Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1998).

- The American Academy of Pediatrics Web site (www.aap.org) offers information on safety, health, immunizations, sudden infant death syndrome and other issues.

[PART 2] Taking care of you

Although everyone is fussing over your new baby, you need special care during the first six weeks postpartum, too. Here's advice from Paul Gluck, M.D., an obstetrician-gynecologist and chairman of the Baptist/South Miami Hospital Foundation in Miami, on how to care for yourself after delivery.

Episiotomy During the first week or so, spritz the area with warm water mixed with a diluted iodine solution (no more than 50 percent iodine) in a squirt bottle whenever you use the toilet. Or sit in a warm Epsom salt bath several times a day. Use toilet paper gingerly — wipe from front to back to avoid fecal contamination. If constipation or bowel move-

Eating well is crucial. Fill your kitchen with healthful, easy-to-grab foods that require little preparation.

ments cause pain, ask your obstetrician about using an over-the-counter stool softener.

Lochia For three to four weeks after delivery — either vaginal or Cesarean — you'll experience a discharge called lochia. It starts out bloody but turns yellowish in about two weeks. Use pads rather than tampons; the latter can irritate the

area and increase your risk of infection. And although you might be tempted to douche, don't — douching can introduce bacteria and lead to infection.

Bleeding If you notice a significant increase in vaginal bleeding or if it's more profuse than a heavy period, you may be doing too much too soon. When bleeding increases, Gluck says, "The first thing I tell a patient is to get off her feet and rest." Keep in mind, however, that your bleeding may increase slightly after breastfeeding, which releases hormones that cause the uterus to contract. Rest will often help here, too.

Cesarean section incision Avoid strenuous activity for a month. "I recommend that the mother lift nothing heavier than her baby during that time," Gluck says. Slow walks are fine if you feel comfortable (see "How Soon Can I ...?" on page 82), but avoid driving or running errands for two weeks. As your incision heals, it may itch or feel numb. This is normal.

Breasts Wash your breasts and nipples with a mild soap. If your nipples crack or bleed, see your doctor or a lactation consultant. Don't use any creams or

POSTPARTUM BLUES



lotions not recommended by a health professional. Painful breasts can be caused by infections or clogged milk ducts; see your doctor if you have pain or fever.

Nutritional needs Finding time for healthful cooking can be difficult when you have a newborn, but eating well is crucial, especially if you're breastfeeding. Elizabeth M. Ward, R.D., author of *Pregnancy Nutrition: Good Health for You and Your Baby* (John Wiley & Sons Inc., 1998), recommends filling your kitchen with healthful food that's easy to grab and requires little preparation: low-fat yogurt and cheese slices, pre-cut fresh fruits and vegetables, salads, peanut butter, hard-boiled eggs, water-packed tuna, single-serving bottles of vegetable and fruit juice, and whole-grain breads, cereals and rolls.

Relationships For many couples, the stresses and demands of pregnancy, childbirth and caring for a newborn can strain a relationship. You and your husband may be too tired for sex. Set aside time for each other at least once a week to go on a date, even if it takes place at the dining room table while the baby sleeps. Hugs, kisses and other expressions of affection are never off limits, but intercourse is *verboten* for four to six weeks because it takes about that long for the cervix to close fully and block contaminants that could cause infection. Ask your doctor about this before you leave the hospital.

*Resources for baby blues

- *Sleepless Days: One Woman's Journey Through Postpartum Depression* by Susan Kushner Resnick (St. Martin's Press, 2000).
- Postpartum Support International (www.postpartum.net) offers information on postpartum depression, a self-assessment, chat rooms and a list of support groups across the United States.



[SUPPORT] NURSING MOMS

A new mom can have trouble getting her baby to latch on or have problems with painful breasts and cracked nipples. Lactation consultants can provide breastfeeding support, advice and helpful techniques. To find a lactation consultant, contact one of the following organizations, your obstetrician or your pediatrician.

24-hour telephone counseling by trained volunteers, breastfeeding support groups, literature; 800-LA LECHE or 847-519-7730; www.lalecheleague.org.

24-hour hot lines, online breastfeeding help, informative articles; 650-599-3669; www.nursingmothers.org.

Online chats, breast pump rentals and sales, other nursing products; 800-835-5968; www.medela.com.

by Kathleen Huggins, R.N., M.S.
(Harvard Common Press, 1999).

by Gwen Gotsch and Judy Torgus
of La Leche League International (Plume, 1997).

by Gwen Gotsch (La Leche League
International, 2000).

Back on the bike (or running trail ... or stair-climber ...)

The following chart, created by the folks at Fit to Deliver (a prenatal-fitness program developed by health care and fitness professionals in Vancouver, Canada), is a guide to what's safe to do when. Some general rules-of-thumb from these experts:

- The period immediately after childbirth isn't the best time to start a new exercise program. In general, stick with the same activities you did before or during your pregnancy.
- You may find that you fatigue faster because of nursing, lack of

sleep and your new parental responsibilities. Listen to your body and slow down if you are tired.

- Drink lots of water, especially if you are breastfeeding.
- You may have increased vaginal flow for a few hours after exercise. This is not cause for concern unless you experience gushing or cramping or pass blood clots.
- Always get your doctor's approval before starting or resuming strenuous activity, especially if you've had a Cesarean section.

* HOW SOON CAN I...?

Before resuming any exercise, check with your doctor. If you were at a high fitness level before and during your pregnancy, you may be able to start exercising sooner than if you were at a low or moderate fitness level. But no matter what level you were, remember to start exercising slowly.

ACTIVITY	AFTER A VAGINAL DELIVERY	AFTER A C-SECTION
Do Kegels	From day 1	From day 1
Walk around the block	As soon as you feel comfortable	As soon as you feel comfortable
Do yoga	2 weeks, with doctor's OK	4-6 weeks
Do ab exercises	2 weeks, with doctor's OK	6 weeks
Lift weights	2 weeks, with doctor's OK	6 weeks
Jog	3-4 weeks	10-12 weeks
Ride a bike	Wait for doctor's approval	10-12 weeks
Kickbox	Wait for doctor's approval	10-12 weeks
Do low-impact aerobics	6 weeks	8-12 weeks
Use the stair-climber	6 weeks	8-12 weeks
Run a 5k	6-8 weeks	12-16 weeks
Run a 10k	12-16 weeks	12-16 weeks



[NEW BABY, NEW FRIENDSHIPS]

When you have a new baby, old friends sometimes drift away. Finding other new moms to be friends with can help, but it can take some legwork. Try these options:

YOUR CHILDBIRTH CLASS Ask the instructor for a class list, and invite members to a reunion at your house.

BREASTFEEDING SUPPORT GROUPS Check out local birthing centers and hospitals.

MOM-AND-BABY FITNESS CLASSES Often offered at health clubs, YWCAs or hospitals.

NEW MOMS' GROUPS Check with community centers, churches or child-care agencies.

Mothers' Helpers

You've probably heard of using a doula to help with your delivery, but did you know that many doulas also offer postpartum help? Doulas and baby nurses can be especially helpful for mothers who've had C-sections, as well as parents who have no family in town to help with the baby.

To find a trusted postpartum doula or baby nurse, check with your local hospital, obstetrician, pediatrician, childbirth instructor or lactation consultant. Or contact one of the following national organizations:

- Doulas of North America: 801-756-7331; www.dona.com.
- Childbirth and Postpartum Professionals Association: 888-548-3672; www.labordoula.com.

The first six weeks are a magical time. It's just you and your baby while the rest of the world fades away.

*Resources for new-mom care

- *The Girlfriends' Guide to Surviving the First Year of Motherhood* by Vicki Iovine (Perigee, 1997).
- *What to Expect the First Year* by Arlene Eisenberg, Hedi E. Murkoff and Sandee E. Hathaway (Workman Publishing Co., 1996).
- www.babycenter.com/postpartumhealth/ offers advice for new mothers on nutrition, exercise and caring for their bodies.
- www.fitpregnancy.com (this magazine's Web site).
- www.momsonline.com offers chats and information for new moms. ■

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