

## Postpartum Wellness

The early postpartum period, the first few weeks after you give birth, is a time of great joy within your family. But it can also be physically and emotionally exhausting as well as overwhelming in the early days as you recover from childbirth and begin to live the reality of caring for your newborn. Thinking ahead is one of the best ways you can care for yourself during this period of adjustment.

### **Mothering the mother is the priority!!**

**Who will be helping you in the first weeks after your baby is born?**

Whether your partner will have some time off, one of your family members comes to stay and help out or you hire a postpartum doula, help in the first several weeks is so important. You need to be able to concentrate on caring for yourself and your baby. Period. Have others keep the house running by doing the laundry, cooking simple meals and running errands. Accept offers of help from family, friends and colleagues. Many people offer to help but aren't sure how. Be specific. Could they pick up your mail for a few days? Would they be interested in walking the dog, or providing a meal? A person who loves to organize might love the project of organizing a food brigade to provide you with meals for a week or two. Who do you know who would be willing to have your older child for a few hours so you can have some time alone with the baby, or take that older child to school or daycare? What about coming to hold the baby for a bit while you nap, have a shower or some special time with your older child?

### **Keep expectations to a minimum.**

Take care of yourself and your baby. Being a new mom is really a full-time job, and sometimes just making time for a shower can be a challenge. Limit your obligations in the first few weeks. Don't be afraid to shut your phone off or limit visitors if that feels right for you. Your body needs lots of rest, lots of nourishment and time to recover from the work of being pregnant and giving birth. You'll feel better sooner if you take time to keep life simple and nurture yourself.

Give yourself time to get to know your baby. Think of crying as your baby's language. Crying is the way he or she will verbally communicate with you in the early days. Give yourself time to learn this new language and fall into your baby's unique rhythm.

### **REST, REST, REST!!**

#### **Take your need for sleep seriously.**

Sleep when your baby sleeps or is being cared for by a trusted friend or family member. Being on 'baby time' is a big adjustment from your former routine and taking a nap during the day may feel silly and wasteful. Keep in mind that you still need that '8 hours' or more, and with a newborn waking through the night you won't see that amount of sleep in one chunk for a while. Make sure the periods of sleep you do get add up to AT LEAST the amount of time you would normally sleep in 24 hours to feel well rested, and make that your daily project. Getting the rest you need during this time of adjustment can make all the difference in your confidence as a new parent.

#### **Your Community Resources**

Identifying your community resources for postpartum support during your pregnancy may feel like one more item on your long 'to do' list, but it's one way you can make things easier in the long run. Compile a list of contacts and their phone numbers for the key support people for your family. Have you chosen your baby's provider? Have you thought about who you'll contact if you need help with breastfeeding support once you leave the hospital? Where will you go to meet and gain support from other new parents? Visit these places while you're pregnant to get a sense of where you'll find the support you'll need once the baby is born.

#### **Adjustment Challenges**

If sadness, anxiety or sleeplessness are interfering with your postpartum adjustment, tell your partner, a family member, your caregiver or a trusted friend. Postpartum mood disorders are VERY treatable with early and proper care!!!

#### **Don't forget**

Take good care of yourself so you can take good care of your baby.

And when your new job seems overwhelming, remember, help is always just a phone call away.