Postpartum Discharge Guide

The first six weeks following the delivery of your baby are known as the postpartum period. This guide was designed to answer the most commonly-asked questions and help you understand the many changes that your body will experience over the next few weeks. If you have any questions during your stay at The Woman’s Hospital of Texas, please ask your nurse. Once you leave the Hospital, please call your doctor’s office with any questions.

When to Call Your Doctor
Please call your doctor if you experience any of the following:

- Temperature of 101 degrees or above,
- Heavy bleeding (soaking a sanitary pad in less than an hour),
- Persistent severe pain or excessive swelling,
- Frequent urination with pain or burning,
- Foul smelling discharge from your vagina,
- If you are worried or troubled, please call your doctor because your doctor is there to help.

Reminders
- Please call your doctor during office hours unless you are experiencing an emergency.
- Please have your pharmacy’s telephone number available.
- Please place the call yourself -- your husband or friend may not be able to answer some of the questions we may ask about your complaint.

Pain Management
After delivery, your uterus continues to contract, and these contractions are referred to as “afterbirth pains.” Afterbirth pains tend to be more acute after the second or third baby. These contractions will last a few days and are sometimes stronger while nursing your baby, due to the hormonal stimulation of the milk letdown reflex. Even though you may experience some discomfort, contractions are a positive sign that your baby is nursing well. You may also experience discomfort from your episiotomy or cesarean incision. The medicine prescribed by your doctor should control the discomfort. As you feel better, you may find that over-the-counter analgesics such as aspirin, Tylenol™, or ibuprofen may be all you need for pain control.

Care of Perineum Following Episiotomy
If you have an episiotomy at the time of delivery, you may experience swelling of the tissues of the perineum. Please follow these instructions:

- Use pads to catch flow, NOT TAMPONS. Change pads frequently.
- Fill your perineal bottle with warm water, and rinse your perineal area well after urinating and every bowel movement.
- Take two to three sitz baths each day in a tub billed with four to six inches of warm water.

You may also wish to use medicated ointment, foam, or spray on the perineal area. Care of the perineum should be continued at home until the discomfort subsides, usually within seven to ten days. If your episiotomy becomes more painful and red instead of getting better, please call your doctor’s office.

Cesarean Birth
A cesarean birth includes all the normal body changes that happen after vaginal delivery as well as healing of an abdominal surgical incision. Six weeks is a realistic time to expect this healing to occur. During your hospital stay, you will be encouraged to move around as frequently as possible. Once home, walking is an excellent form of exercise until your postpartum visit. Delay any strenuous exercise for at least six weeks. Be sure to keep your incision clean and dry. DO NOT RUB THE INCISION. Please call your doctor’s office if incisional drainage becomes constant or excessive, or if red streaks or severe tenderness develop around the incision.

Preventing Constipation
Constipation is common after delivery due to relaxed bowel and abdominal musculature. If you experience constipation, do the following:

- Keep bowel movement soft by drinking six to nine glasses of water each day;
- Eat foods high in fiber, such as fruits with skin and whole grain cereals;
- Take one or two tablespoons of Milk of Magnesia at night if needed.

Hemorrhoids are a common result of delivery; however, they usually get better and disappear. The application of small, medicated pads called Tucks™ or hemorrhoidal creams can help relieve the discomfort. Some women find applying witch hazel with a soft cloth to the rectal area may be soothing.

Vaginal Discharge (Lochia)
Following your delivery, you can expect a bloody vaginal discharge called lochia. This flow may last four to six weeks. The color of your lochia should change from the bright red seen just after delivery to a darker brown and finally to a creamy tone. Increased activity may result in heavier bleeding or a return to a redder color. You should limit your activity until the bleeding decreases. Please call your doctor if you experience excessive bleeding, foul smelling discharge, acute abdominal pain, or a sudden fever. Following your vaginal or cesarean delivery, it is best to take showers or sponge baths until instructed otherwise.

Menses
Your menstrual cycle usually reappears between the 4th and 12th week after delivery, if not breastfeeding. It may take several months to reestablish a regular cycle. The first menstrual period may be heavier than usual.

Breast Care For Promoting Milk Production
Your breasts may feel heavier and firmer sometime between three to five days after delivery. This is the increase in milk production you and your baby have been anticipating. Continue feeding your baby eight to twelve times each day to promote milk flow from the breast. Breasts should feel softer and lighter after a feeding. Wearing a supportive, properly-fitting bra may help during this time. You may find it comfortable to wear a soft, light support bra at night. Do not sleep in an underwire bra.

Please contact your doctor’s office if you have any of the following signs of breast infection:

- Elevated temperature above 100.2,
- Localized redness and swelling of breast,
- Localized tenderness and a painful breast.
Breast Care for Discouraging Milk Production

Your breasts may respond to the hormonal changes of birth and begin milk production even though your plans are to feed your baby formula. To minimize the stimulation of milk production, we suggest wearing a bra that provides firm comfortable support for breasts that are swollen or fuller than usual. Ice packs applied for 20 minutes every two to three hours will relieve swelling as well. Some women use a loosely-applied ace wrap to hold the ice packs in place. Tylenol™, ibuprofen or aspirin may be used for pain relief. This period of discomfort usually resolves itself within 48 to 72 hours, but may last up to two weeks.

Sexual Relations

Please don’t put anything in your vagina prior to your follow-up visit with your doctor. NO sexual relations are allowed for four to six weeks or until after your postpartum examination and discussion about contraception. This helps avoid infection and allows the vaginal wall and uterus time to heal and regain strength.

When your physician indicates it is safe to resume sexual relations, you may initially find it uncomfortable because the vaginal tissues may still be tender. Vaginal lubrication is lower than usual because of your decreased estrogen level. Using a lubricating agent may help minimize your discomfort.

Please remember that you can become pregnant soon after the birth of your baby. Refer to the section on contraception, and discuss this with your partner before sexual relations occur.

Contraception

There are several forms of birth control that you may use. These include birth control pills, the Norplant™ system, Depo-Provera™, an IUD, a diaphragm, condoms, and spermicide. Each has its own advantages and disadvantages, and your doctor can discuss your options before you leave the Hospital or during your first office visit.

If breastfeeding, use a barrier method of contraception, such as spermicide, condoms, or diaphragm. Your doctor may prescribe what is called a “mini-pill” if you are breastfeeding. However, this pill is less effective than the traditional birth control pill.

Diet

You may resume your usual diet following your delivery.

General Activity

During the first and second week, be sure to rest during the day. Focus your energy on your baby. Assign housework to other family members following your delivery.

During the third week, you may drive a car and increase your physical activity. If bleeding becomes heavier or if you experience contractions or pain during the activity, please reduce the activities immediately and call your doctor’s office for advice. Please ask your doctor about Kegel exercises.

If you had a cesarean birth, DO NOT LIFT anything heavier than your baby. Your incision requires four to six weeks to completely heal. If you have other children who want to be held, encourage them to climb up in your lap rather than your lifting them.

LISTEN TO YOUR BODY. When you feel tired, try to rest. Remember that you are recovering from a physical and emotional event that has had an enormous effect on your body.

Postpartum Emotions

A number of new mothers may experience emotional changes following delivery. In the past, these feelings were labeled “postpartum blues” and were rarely taken seriously. Today, it is recognized that postpartum emotional changes may evolve into serious problems of depression and should be treated by a physician.

Stress during pregnancy (especially undue concern about body image), anxiety about the responsibility of mothering, and basic endocrine changes can cause psychological changes anywhere from three to 30 days after childbirth. In some causes, depression can occur up to a year later.

Surprisingly, 20 to 40 percent of new mothers report emotional disturbances, usually within three to seven days of delivery. Early symptoms include insomnia, restlessness, fatigue, irritability, headaches, and rapid mood changes. Later, symptoms may increase significantly to include lack of appetite, unreasonable concern over trivialities, confusion or incoherence, suspiciousness, and irrational behavior.

Depressed patients center their feelings on the mother-child relationship, either being excessively concerned about the baby’s welfare or feeling incapable of caring for the baby.

Seek treatment immediately for these disorders by contacting your obstetrician for a psychiatric referral.

Any woman who has had a baby in the last year can be affected regardless of how many uncomplicated pregnancies and postpartum adjustments she has had. If you feel that you are experiencing some of the symptoms of postpartum blues, depression or psychosis, there is help available. All of the symptoms, from the mildest to the most severe, are temporary and treatable with support and skilled professional help.

Postpartum Checkup

Prior to your discharge from the Hospital, you will be told when you need to be seen for your postpartum follow-up visit. Physician schedules vary, so please schedule your appointment soon after your discharge so that the best dates and times are available.

PLEASE ALWAYS REMEMBER
If your doctor's instructions differ from this information, please follow your doctor’s instructions.
The Hospital and Medical Staff at The Woman's Hospital of Texas have enjoyed caring for you during this special time and offer our congratulations on the birth of your child. We hope this information has answered your questions and concerns about the weeks ahead. The Woman's Hospital Education Department invites you to participate in their new parent support groups and services.

### Lactation Support Center
- Breast pumps and baby scales for rent or sale
- Breastfeeding supplies and nursing bras
- Bra fittings, by appointment
Located in the Education Department, Suite 148, on the ground floor of the Hospital parking garage. Hours: Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
713.383.2895

### Support Groups
All support groups are free of charge. Registration is not required. Complimentary valet parking is available at the main entrance of the Hospital. Your parking will be validated.

#### New Moms’ Lactation Support Group
Mondays, 10:00-11:30 a.m., Classroom 150
Certified Lactation Consultants will provide weekly help, information, and encouragement to mothers who are getting started breastfeeding. This group is open to moms with babies up to six weeks old. Attendance is restricted to women and infants, please.

#### Birth, Baby and Beyond
Thursdays, 10:00-11:30 a.m., Classroom D
Join us for an informal gathering of expectant and new parents and babies up to one year of age. We discuss issues of concern to you, such as sleeping, crying, feeding, and family relationship changes. Each session has a scheduled discussion topic or guest speaker, followed by an open forum and visiting.

#### Pregnancy and Postpartum Depression Support Group
Mondays, 12:30-1:30 p.m., Classroom 150
This is a group for those facing changes and challenges related to pregnancy or new parenthood. Discussion may include:
- Baby blues, prenatal or postpartum depression or anxiety;
- Self-care while caring for a child;
- Relationship changes and challenges;
- How to handle the daily stress.
For more information, please call 713.791.7495 (Education Dept.) or 713.791.7404 (Coordinator of Childbirth and Parenting Education).

#### La Leche League
Second Wednesday of each month, 9:45-11:00 a.m., Classroom D
and first Saturday of each month, 10:00-11:15 a.m., Classroom D
La Leche League is an international, non-profit, non-sectarian organization dedicated to providing education, support, and encouragement to women who want to breastfeed. Leaders are volunteer experienced mothers with training in breastfeeding counseling.

La Leche League’s Bellaire/West University chapter meets at The Woman’s Hospital of Texas monthly. There are many local chapters around the greater Houston area. Visit www.LLLTexas.org to find the group nearest you.

### Other Comments or Instructions
Make an appointment to see your doctor in ______ weeks.

Doctor’s Name __________________________________ Phone number ______________________________

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