Your baby has just been born, and this event will transform your life. All over the world and in all cultures, mothers and babies are given a period of several weeks’ rest to live through this transition. **Give yourself this time!** Take the time to create favourable conditions in your surroundings for a happy start in life, motherhood and fatherhood!

It generally takes a few weeks to get your normal level of energy back. It is not a sign of weakness; it is that your energy is occupied elsewhere: recuperating, transforming those body tissues which had accommodated your pregnancy and birth, starting and maintaining milk production, living an extraordinary psychological adaptation to your new role as a mother and often healing wounds to the body and to the heart. After a caesarian, recuperating will be longer for your body because of the surgery involved. Be patient, take care of yourself and don’t hesitate to ask for help when you need it. **Doing nothing during the first weeks is the most important job!**

After giving birth, you should spend most of the next days in bed, getting up only to do your toileting, to eat, and to care of your baby. The muscles and tendons which were stretched during pregnancy to accommodate the growth of your baby will remain so for some time. It will take several weeks for their tone to return to normal. Your muscles therefore need you to be more often in a horizontal position so that they are not carrying the weight of your stomach while they are trying to return to their shape.

Someone should be with you during the first days. You can begin to return to a few activities, very gradually, during the second week, and this, even if you feel enough energy beforehand: preserve your energy! The postnatal period is not a sprint. The sooner you let yourself fall into this change of rhythm, the better it will be.

### Breastfeeding

The colostrum (first milk) is perfect for your baby and it is all he needs during the first days. Its very rich composition compensates for the fact that it comes in small amounts to allow for your baby to gradually get used to digestion. Put your baby on the breast as soon as he is awake without worrying about a schedule.

Newborns don’t know hunger; it is a new sensation which they will take a while to recognize and to express. Don’t wait for his cries or his « demands » to breastfeed. Most newborns are ready to breastfeed every two to three hours. Let your baby drink until he seems sleepy and satisfied. You may have to stimulate him to keep him awake if he has a tendency to fall asleep during feedings. During the first days, it is important that baby takes both breasts regularly.

Each mother and each baby is unique. Your breastfeeding experience will also be.
The normal process during the days following birth

For the mother

Lochia (uterine discharge)

- After a birth, for a day or two, the loss of blood and uterine liquids (called lochia) will be more abundant than a menstruation. They will gradually diminish in quantity and will change colour and texture, going from red to pinkish to brown.

- You may occasionally discharge a blood clot, especially in the morning, after urinating or breastfeeding. Lochia may become redder and more abundant following an unusual effort. As of the second week, you may experience a newly red and slightly more abundant bleeding during about 24 hours.

- You may feel contractions especially when breastfeeding. These may be especially strong with your second baby and more. Speak to your midwife if you need to relieve the pain.

- Do not use tampons until the end of the lochia, which usually last between 3 and 6 weeks.

Personal hygiene

- Principles of good hygiene are particularly important after giving birth: a daily shower or bath, hand washing after using the toilet, a clean bathroom, always wipe from front to back, etc. Change your sanitary pad frequently, at least every 3 to 4 hours.

- During the first week, baths are safe as long as you stay seated in the bath. After the first week you may take your regular baths. Vaginal douching is not recommended. It is also suggested not to go swimming for the duration of the lochias or any important discharge.

Vulva and Perineum Care

- If you feel a burning sensation while urinating, splash the vulva warm water using a hand shower or a plastic squirt bottle.

- The first time you have a bowel movement (sometimes days after giving birth) may seem worrying. Breathe slowly, do not push, relax; don’t worry: even if you have stiches, they won’t get undone. If you haven’t had a bowel movement after 3 or 4 days, add fibre to your diet.

- Once or twice a day, you can take a small bath for 10 to 15 minutes. Use clear water at the desired temperature. Certain women like to add a Comfrey herb infusion (a fistful of comfrey root in a litre of boiling water, infused for 30 minutes and filtered before being poured in the bath) or 1 teaspoon of sea salt.
If you have stitches, do not use bath seats (plastic basins): the edges put too much pressure on the stitches; however, bath seats can be helpful for haemorrhoids.

Exercise your perineum (kegel exercises / contracting and releasing the muscles of the base of the pelvis) from the first day after giving birth and increase the number of these up to 100 per day around the end of the first week (10 series of 10 exercises). At first, only do them lying down. Your midwife can give you more information on exercises you can do later to re-tone your perineum.

**Breast and nipple care**

During the first days after giving birth, your breasts produce colostrum, perfectly adapted to your baby’s needs. In response to the stimulation caused by frequent feedings, your breasts will increase their production around the third day: this may be uncomfortable for 24 to 48 hours… or pass unnoticed.

- It is normal for breasts to be swollen and sensitive at the beginning of lactation around the third day. It is possible to have a little fever at that moment (not over 38.5°C)
- Some women prefer to wear a bra during the night. Make sure it is the right size.
- It is normal for the nipples to be sensitive during the first days until they become accustomed to baby’s sucking. After each feeding, extract a little milk and coat your nipples with it in order to protect them. You can also use lanolin, which doesn’t need to be removed before your next feeding. For all other products, check with your midwife if they must be washed off before breastfeeding.
- If nursing is painful, if your breasts are clogged, if you have difficulties with breastfeeding, don’t hesitate to call your midwife.

**Diet Rest and activities**

- It is important to eat well: lots of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, proteins, etc. Breastfeeding requires more liquids: drink a large glass of water or juice each time you breastfeed. Your milk production does not depend on your consumption of milk.
- Laxative foods such as prune puree or juice, bran in cereals or muffins will facilitate your first bowel movements.
- For alcohol and caffeine, moderation is recommended (or even abstinence in the case of alcohol) since all that you consume passes into your milk.

**Rest and activities Visitors**

- “Sleep every time baby sleeps!” is the general rule to follow during the first weeks. Have 2 naps a day during the first week, and one nap afterwards.
• Do not have any activities other than taking care of yourself and your baby during the first week. In which case, you need a constant helper (partner, family, and friends) for domestic tasks, care of other children, and a part-time helper for the second and third weeks.

• When you go out after the first week has gone by, remember that you will tire more easily and maybe suddenly. Proportion your energy and make your outings short.

• Exercises to get back your waistline are not recommended during the first weeks.

• For the father, it is also important to make up for lost sleep and accept help in order to be free to enjoy his new family.

Visitors

• In the first days, too many visitors can be exhausting. Limit your visitors to a strict minimum: grandparents, close friends, etc…

• Be clear and firm on the subject of visit length (ex: maximum 30 minutes). As soon as you feel tired, excuse yourself and go back to bed.

Call your midwife if:

• You fill 2 or more sanitary pads in less than an hour;

• You have many blood clots larger than the size of an egg;

• Your discharge has a nauseating smell;

• You have a temperature higher than 38.5C or 100F;

• Your scar becomes red, painful and oozing;

• You feel pain in a calf;

• You have problems with your breasts or nipples (redness, pain, chapping)
For the baby

Sleep

- Always lay your baby on his back. If he has reflux of secretions coming from his stomach, observe how he has all the reflexes to manage the situation well: it is also what he does when you are not watching.
- A newborn can sleep a lot during the first 24 hours; he is also recovering. Thereafter, he should wake on his own to drink, and be vigorous and alert in his moments of wake. If he is asleep for more than 4 hours during the day, pick him up, uncover him, and stimulate him to wake him up. At night-time, let him sleep unless otherwise indicated by your midwife.

Urine & Stools

- During the first days, newborns urinate in small quantities. Once baby is absorbing a good quantity of milk, towards the end of the first week, he will easily wet 6-8 diapers per day.
- In the first days of life, stools are black and sticky: it is meconium. In the following days, they will gradually change colours and consistency to finally become mustard yellow, liquid and/or grainy.
- In the first days, some babies may have pinkish-orange deposits in their diaper. It consists of urate crystals in the urine, it is normal. Some baby girls can have mucus and sometimes even light blood discharge from the vagina. This is normal.

Breathing

- Newborns breath through the nose. The normal breathing rhythm per minute is between 40 and 60 breaths, and is often irregular: a few seconds of pause and often a few moments of fast breathing.
- It is normal to hear secretions when the baby breathes: he will get rid of them sneezing or by swallowing milk at the next feeding.
- Newborns often have hiccups lasting a few minutes; they stop on their own.

Temperature

- Newborns need heat; it is important to cover him well, though not too much; you will decide according to the season. Generally, he needs one layer of clothing more than you. It is normal for baby’s feet and hands to be noticeably colder than the rest of his body.
- The normal temperature of your baby’s body varies between 36.0°C and 37.5°C.
- When the house is heated, it is recommended to humidify the air.
Skin

- Baby’s skin is pink and becomes redder when he cries vigorously. It is normal for his feet and hands to bluish at times.

- Your baby may have jaundice around the third day, which is normal for a healthy newborn. Your midwife will evaluate the jaundice during postnatal visits and will give you appropriate advice.

- Baby may have dry skin, especially on his hands and feet. For this, you may use natural lotions and oils. In addition, he may sometimes have a small red eruptions on the body during the first weeks: it is newborn erythema. These harmless eruptions have the singularity of spontaneously disappearing and reappearing elsewhere on the body.

- Your baby does not need bathing as of the first day. When you will bath him, do not worry about wetting the piece of umbilical cord: all have to do is dry the contour well with a Q-tip, and dry the little creases in baby’s skin where humidity can stay. Above all, think of the bath as a moment of pleasure, of contact with water, this element which he knew so well during 9 months. That is what he needs the most.

Umbilical cord

- The remaining umbilical cord will dry up and become darker in the first two days. It usually falls off within the first two weeks of life.
- The cord should be kept dry and clean. Fold the baby’s diaper so that it stays under the belly button.
- It is normal for the cord to seem humid or to let off an unpleasant odour with yellowish or brownish secretions. Clean the base with a Q-tip dipped in water, and then dry well. It is not necessary to use alcohol.

Call your midwife if your baby presents the following signs:

- Difficulty breathing, noisy or abnormally rapid breathing during a prolonged period;
- Jaundice in the first 24 hours;
- Baby is pale or bluish around the mouth;
- Lethargy; unusual drowsiness and lack of appetite;
- Unusual swelling and redness of the eyelids with discharge;
- Clear red bleeding from umbilical cord or inflammation around the base;
- Unusually high-pitched piercing cries;
- Appearance of bruises (ecchymosis), and/or small red spots (petechia) on the skin;
- Vomiting bile or repeated jet vomiting;
- Presence of blood in stool.

Do not hesitate to call if you are worried!
Best wishes for a happy maternity and paternity!

**********************************************************************************************

Besides your midwife, you will find breastfeeding information/support at:

- CLSC and community breastfeeding support groups of your area
- Jack Newman’s website http://www.breastfeedinginc.ca/
- La Leche League http://www.allaitement.ca/ or http://www.lllc.ca
  1-866-255-2483 (1-866-ALLAITER) or 514 990-8917
  English service : 514 842-4780
- Fédération Québécoise Nourri-Source 514 948-9877
  http://www.nourri-source.org/
- Association québécoise des consultantes en lactation diplômées de l’IBLCE (AQC)
  http://www.ibclc.qc.ca/
- Info-santé : 811