



# Caring for Yourself and Your New Family

## Congratulations on the arrival of your baby(s)!

This handout has been divided into three parts to help you know about:

- ▶ **Who and When to Call for Help**
- ▶ **Taking Care of Yourself**
- ▶ **Taking Care of Your New Baby**

Some of the handouts we hope you will read are in this envelope. Other handouts are in the holder on the wall by the nurse's station.

We hope you find this handout helpful both while you are in the hospital and when you are at home.

# Table of Contents

## **Taking Care of Yourself After a Vaginal or Cesarean Birth**

Changes in Your Womb (Uterus) .....	1
Cramps (After Pains) .....	1
Changes in Your Vaginal Discharge.....	1
Changes in the Area Between Your Vagina and Rectum (Your Perineum) .....	1
Cesarean Birth.....	2
Changes in Temperature .....	3
Changes in Peeing (Urination).....	3
Leg and Ankle Swelling.....	4
Hemorrhoids .....	4
Hard Stools (Constipation) .....	4
Managing Your Pain .....	5
Eating Well .....	5
Managing Your Energy.....	5
Changes in Your Emotions .....	6
Parenting .....	7
Having Sex Again.....	8

## **Taking Care of Your Baby**

Your Baby's Safety.....	10
Your Baby's Characteristics .....	10
Caring for Your Baby .....	11
Soothing Your Baby .....	13
Your Baby's Senses .....	14
Your Baby's Behaviour .....	15

# **Taking Care of Yourself After a Vaginal or Cesarean Birth**

## **Changes in Your Womb (Also called your uterus)**

After your baby is born your uterus is firm and round. The top of it can be felt just above your belly button (umbilicus). Each day after birth it slowly gets smaller. Your nurse will feel your uterus to make sure it is getting smaller and staying firm. By six to eight weeks after birth, your uterus is back to where it was before pregnancy.

## **Cramps (Also called after pains)**

Some women have cramps called after pains during the first week after the birth. After pains are caused by the relaxing and tightening (contraction) of your uterus. They feel like labour pains. If you have had children before you are more likely to have strong after pains. Breastfeeding causes your uterus to contract and slows your bleeding. You may feel stronger after pains during or after breastfeeding your baby. They usually go away after the first week.

### *Helpful Hints:*

- ▶ Do your relaxation and deep breathing exercises.
- ▶ Pee (empty your bladder) before breastfeeding.
- ▶ Take pain medication at least thirty minutes before breastfeeding.
- ▶ Put a warm water bottle on your tummy if you have had a vaginal birth.

## **Changes in Your Vaginal Discharge (Also called flow or lochia)**

Your vaginal discharge may last for six weeks. In the first three days after birth the discharge is bright red. It may have some small clumps of blood in it called clots and these should be about the size of a loonie. Five to seven days after birth, the amount of discharge should less and change to a pinkish colour. After that time, the discharge should be yellowish white to brownish and small in amount, like the last days of your period (menstrual flow).

While you are in the hospital your nurse will be checking for the amount of flow. If you pass a clump of blood (clot) larger than a loonie piece, please save it and show it to your nurse. If your discharge becomes heavier than your normal period or you have a “gush” of blood, call your nurse.

After you are home, if your flow soaks more than one maxi pad an hour for more than two hours or you notice a strong smell, call your doctor or midwife.

## **Changes in the Area Between Your Vagina and Rectum (Also called your perineum)**

Keep this area clean by using your peri-bottle each time you use the washroom. This is very important. The peri-bottle is the one given to you when you came to the unit. Always wash and wipe your perineum from front to back, and pat dry gently.

In the first twenty-four hours, put ice on your perineum to reduce swelling and decrease pain. Wrap the ice pack in a thin layer of cloth before putting it on your skin. Putting ice right on your skin can hurt it. If you have stitches on your perineum they may cause discomfort and itching while they heal.

After twenty-four hours, sitting in warm water (a sitz bath) may also help soothe and heal the area. If you have stitches this can also help heal them. There are two ways you can have a sitz bath:

1. Fill your clean bathtub with five to ten centimeters (two to four inches) of warm water. Sit in the tub for **ten minutes. Do this two to three times a day.**
2. Buy a sitz bath. Fill it with warm water and sit in it for **ten minutes. Do this two to three times a day.** You can buy sitz baths in the gift shop and at some drug stores and medical supply stores.

### *Helpful Hints:*

- ▶ Lie in bed for ten minutes after your sitz bath and air dry your perineum. Use your hair dryer on cool setting to help. Direct the air back and forth across your stitches, not straight on them.
- ▶ Tighten and relax the muscles in your vagina as often as you think about it or at least three times a day. These are also called Kegel exercises. Read about them in the handout “**Basic Exercise Guidelines After You Have Had Your Baby**”, found in the envelope. You can also read and print it from the [www.bcwomens.ca](http://www.bcwomens.ca) under Health Topics A-Z pamphlet list.
- ▶ When you are at home call your doctor or midwife if:
  - your perineum feels different
  - becomes more painful or swollen
  - you notice some smelly discharge
  - the stitches have opened
  - you have other concerns

## **Cesarean Birth**

If you had a cesarean birth, the bandage covering your incision is usually taken off the day after your surgery. This helps the healing process. If staples were used to close your incision they are taken out by the nurse usually on the second or third day after the birth. By this time the skin has healed enough to stay together. Stitches that do not need to be removed dissolve in about seven days after birth.

You may have tape across your incision line. The tape helps to hold the incision together until it heals completely. You do not need to remove these tapes. They slowly peel off on their own. It is not unusual for the area around your incision to feel numb for a few months. The feeling will slowly return to normal.

### *Helpful Hints:*

- ▶ To get out of bed, turn onto your side and push yourself up with your arms. When you are in the hospital it is also helpful to roll the head of your bed up.

- ▶ Wear loose clothing to avoid pressure and rubbing on your incision.
- ▶ Support your tummy with a pillow or folded towel when coughing.

## Care of Your Incision

- ▶ Shower for the first several days.
- ▶ Do not use soap or rubbing alcohol on your incision.
- ▶ Do not lift anything heavier than your baby for a few weeks.

For more information read the handout **Cesarean Birth** found in the holder on the wall by the nurse's station.

## Management of Gas

Gas pains are common after a cesarean birth. How strong they are differs from one person to another. Gas pains are most likely to occur between one and four days after surgery.

### *Helpful Hints:*

- ▶ After a cesarean birth, you can eat what you feel like as soon as you feel ready and are not throwing up. Do not drink gassy fluids such as orange and apple juices, and drinks with bubbles in it(carbonated drinks).
- ▶ Change your position in bed at least every four hours. Lying on your left side with your knees bent is a good position.
- ▶ Take a few short walks each day. Increase the number of walks everyday as you are able.
- ▶ Drink warm drinks. It is better than cold drinks.

## Changes in Temperature

You may feel warmer as your breasts fill with more milk. Many women also find they sweat more than usual during the first twenty-four to forty eight hours after giving birth.

### *Helpful Hints:*

- ▶ Drink six to eight glasses of water or clear fluids a day.
- ▶ Call your doctor or midwife if your temperature stays above 38 degrees Celsius.
- ▶ Dress in clothes that can keep you in a comfortable temperature.

## Changes in Peeing (Also called Urination)

You may need to pee often in the first two to five days. For one or two days after your birth, you may not be able to feel when your bladder is full.

### *Helpful Hints:*

- ▶ Drink six to eight glasses of water or clear fluids a day.
- ▶ Pee about every two to three hours.

- ▶ Call your doctor or midwife if you have problems when you pee such as:
  - feeling pain or pressure inside
  - a burning feeling
  - you are not able to pee
  - feeling a strong need to pee but very little comes out
  - needing to pee more than once an hour.

## Leg and Ankle Swelling

Your legs and ankles may be swollen during the first twenty-four to forty-eight hours. The swelling may not go down for several weeks. This is normal.

### *Helpful Hints:*

- ▶ Put your legs above the level of your hips when you rest, watch TV or read.
- ▶ Do not cross your legs.
- ▶ If your legs and ankles become more swollen, red and painful, call your doctor or midwife.

## Hemorrhoids

Swelling of the veins of the anal canal are called hemorrhoids. They may cause extreme pain near your anus during the first few days after the birth. Over time they slowly get smaller and in most cases disappear.

### *Helpful Hints:*

- ▶ Put ice bags on the area right after birth. Keep doing this as long as it helps.
- ▶ Sit on a “ring” made out of towels or buy a soft rubber one. This takes the pressure off this area.
- ▶ Use a hemorrhoid cream which is **ordered** by your doctor or midwife or suggested by your pharmacist.
- ▶ Eat foods that are high in fiber and drink at least six to eight glasses of water a day.
- ▶ Lie in the bathtub with warm water.
- ▶ Clean the area after each poo (stool) with warm water from the peri-bottle and wipe gently.
- ▶ Do not sit on the toilet for a long time. Do not force bowel movements.
- ▶ Use laxatives or stool softeners as suggested by your doctor, midwife or pharmacist.

## Hard Stools (Also called constipation)

It may take up to one week for your normal bowel pattern to return. Eating more fiber in your diet such bran muffins, vegetables, fruits and drinking six to eight glasses of clear fluids a day helps soften stools. You may need to take a stool softener or mild laxative. Ask your doctor, midwife, nurse or pharmacist.

## Managing Your Pain

You may feel some pain for different reasons after your birth. How you deal with pain depends on your past experience. Try the methods of pain relief that have worked for you in the past. You may want to try ice packs, deep breathing, sitting on a soft rubber ring and pain medication to help relieve your pain. If the pain still stops you from relaxing and taking care of your baby tell your nurse, doctor, or midwife.

You may need some pain medication at home. Talk to your doctor or midwife about this before you leave the hospital.

### *Helpful Hints:*

- ▶ Take pain medication regularly. This is usually every four to six hours during the first few days.
- ▶ Pain medication works better if you take it before the pain gets too bad.
- ▶ If your pain medication is not keeping you comfortable, talk to your nurse, doctor or midwife.

## Eating Well

A well balanced diet is important for your future health. A balanced diet includes a mix of:

- protein such as meat, fish, poultry, beans or tofu,
- green and yellow vegetables,
- fruits,
- whole grain cereals and breads,
- milk products such as milk, yogurt, and cheese.

Mothers who choose to breastfeed their babies usually eat the same diet they had during pregnancy and drink to thirst.

Mothers who choose to bottle feed their babies may begin to eat again like they did before pregnancy.

Ask your doctor or midwife about vitamin and folic acid supplements.

### *Helpful Hints:*

- ▶ Let someone else shop and make your meals.
- ▶ Eat four to five smaller meals throughout the day rather than trying to eat three meals a day.
- ▶ Have lots of prepared foods ready for you to eat anytime.

## Managing Your Energy

No matter how you gave birth to your baby, give yourself a chance to regain your energy. During the first few weeks try to look after yourself and your baby only. The more you rest and take care of yourself the sooner your energy level will return to normal.

### *Helpful Hints:*

- ▶ Take rest periods during the day.
- ▶ Slowly increase your activity each day.
- ▶ Have a support person with you for the first week or two. It is best if you feel very comfortable with this person.
- ▶ Take help from your partner, family and friends.
- ▶ Let others do things you do not have to such as housework.
- ▶ Sleep when your baby is sleeping. Unplug your phone. Place a “Do Not Disturb” sign or “Mom and Baby Sleeping” sign on your front door.
- ▶ Limit visitors for the first two weeks.
- ▶ Take pain medication before doing uncomfortable activities.

Some mothers start with very simple exercises in the first twenty-four hours after birth. For more information on exercise after your baby is born read the handouts:

- **“Basic Exercise Guidelines After You Have Had Your Baby”** found in the envelope
- **“Exercises After Your Cesarean Birth”**, found in the holder on the wall by the nurse’s station.

## Changes in Your Emotions

### **The “Blues”**

About eight out of ten or 80% of new mothers experience the ‘baby blues’. Baby blues are most common on the third to fifth day after birth but can happen any time during first seven to ten days. If you have the blues you may feel very emotional and may cry very easily. This usually lasts for a few days. This is not postpartum depression.

### *Helpful Hints:*

- ▶ Let the feelings come. Try not to hold the feelings back.
- ▶ Talk to someone you trust about your feelings. Help others to understand your strong emotions are the baby blues.
- ▶ Set small goals and follow a simple routine each day.
- ▶ Take a break from your baby when you need to.
- ▶ Take small breaks away from baby such as having a cup of tea while baby is sleeping.
- ▶ Read the hints under Managing Your Energy.
- ▶ Read the handout **“Taking Care of Your ‘Self’ With a New Baby”** found in the envelope.

## Postpartum Depression

Postpartum depression may occur in the weeks or months after the birth of a baby. Some of the feelings you may have at this time are: sadness, anger, worthlessness, irritability, numbness, aloneness and guilt. You may have scary thoughts of harming the new baby. Remember you have no control over these feelings and experiences. If you are having **any** of these feelings, **please** ask for help right away. Call your nurse, doctor or midwife.



### *Helpful Hints:*

- ▶ Talk to someone you trust. Tell a friend, your doctor, midwife or community health nurse how you are feeling.
- ▶ Read about the help you can get in “**Taking Care of Your ‘Self’ With a New Baby**”.
- ▶ Have someone else call for help for you if you are unable to.
- ▶ Read the helpful hints under “Managing Your Energy and Postpartum Blues”.

## **Baby’s Father’s Feelings**

As a new father, you may be having a lot of different feelings too. For example, you may be feeling excited, ecstatic, tired, scared, overwhelmed, left out, jealous, and proud. Just as new mothers need time to adjust to a new baby, so do you. We encourage you to be involved in the care of your new baby right from the beginning.

### *Helpful Hints:*

- ▶ Learn to take care of your baby as much as possible.
- ▶ Hold, talk, and make eye contact with your baby.
- ▶ Hold your baby skin to skin.
- ▶ Talk to your partner about your feelings.
- ▶ Talk with other new fathers.

## **Parenting**

Whether you have been a parent before or not, parenting a new child is one of the most challenging experiences of your lifetime! Most of us have little training in how to parent. Most of us learn on the job. Most of us raise our children the same way we were raised.

Parenting is a very complex issue that lasts a lifetime! Here are some ideas you may find helpful during the first two weeks of your new parenting experience.

### *Helpful Hints:*

- ▶ Sleep when baby is sleeping.
- ▶ Take turns at calming the baby. One of you sleeps while the other one is with the baby.
- ▶ Limit visitors. Leave a message on your answering machine or on the door that says “baby and family sleeping”.
- ▶ If possible have someone else come into the house to clean and do laundry and cook.
- ▶ Set aside a time each day to talk and share your feelings to each other.
- ▶ Remember to laugh together. Keep in mind that this experience will not go on forever.
- ▶ Take one day at a time and set small goals.
- ▶ If you have any questions or concerns, call your doctor, midwife, your community health nurse or BCNurseLine (Metro Vancouver 604 215-4700 or Toll free elsewhere in B.C. 1-888-215-4700).

If you already have children at home, you will be challenged with new feelings and experiences. For example, you may feel very sad, or guilty at leaving your older child for the first time, or for not being able to spend much time with him or her once you are at home. Your other children may feel angry or jealous at the new baby and you because they no longer have your full attention. They may feel unloved and rejected. **This is called sibling rivalry.**

### *Helpful Hints:*

- ▶ Have your other children visit you and your baby in hospital. Your other children need to be with another adult while visiting.
- ▶ Have a special gift for them from the new baby.
- ▶ Leave them with a special person such as a grandparent.
- ▶ Encourage them to talk about their feelings.
- ▶ Tell them that you miss them, they are special and that you love them.
- ▶ Set a special time to spend with them throughout the day.
- ▶ If you are busy with the baby, have a special bag of toys for them to play with during this time.
- ▶ Let them help with baby and hold baby when you are there. Tell them they are doing a good job or are a big help.
- ▶ **Don't leave your baby alone with his or her young brother or sister.**

## Having Sex Again

It is you and your partner's choice when you feel ready to have sex again. It is safe to have sex once your vaginal discharge has stopped. Ask yourself three other questions before having sex again:

- ▶ Is your perineum comfortable?
- ▶ What method of birth control are you going to use?
- ▶ Are you feeling like you want to?

If for any reason you feel you are not ready, talk to your partner. Your partner may be feeling the same way.

### *Helpful Hints:*

- ▶ Hugging, holding, snuggling, hand holding and back rubs are other ways to be feel close sexually if you are not ready to have intercourse.
- ▶ Set aside a time together without the baby and talk about how you are feeling.
- ▶ Use spermicidal foam or jelly as a method of birth control as this helps lubricate the vagina.
- ▶ If you have any concerns about having sex again or you are worried because you don't feel interested talk to your doctor, midwife or community health nurse.

## Birth Control

- ▶ If you are not breastfeeding, you can become pregnant quite soon after baby is born, around four to nine weeks after birth. Couples need to choose a birth control method before having sex again.
- ▶ If you are breastfeeding, you have a very small chance (less than two percent) of becoming pregnant. In other words breastfeeding can protect you 98% from pregnancy **but only** if these three things apply to you:
  - You are fully breastfeeding. This means your baby only gets food from you. Your baby eats at least every four hours during the day and every six hours at night. Your baby does not have any formula or cereal. **and**
  - Your periods have not returned since eight weeks after birth. This means you have not had a normal period since your baby was born. **and**
  - Your baby is less than six months old.
  - **When any of these is no longer true, you are more likely to become pregnant. You need to choose another birth control method to prevent pregnancy.**
- ▶ Talk about birth control methods with your doctor, midwife or community health nurse.

# Taking Care of Your Baby

(To make it simpler to read we will talk about the baby as a girl)

## Your Baby's Safety

- ▶ Always have a responsible adult be with your baby unless she is sleeping in bed. Read “Safe Sleeping...For you and Your Baby (in the first year)” and “Back to Sleep” in your package.
- ▶ Support baby's head and neck when you are holding her. A baby's neck muscles are not yet fully developed.
- ▶ Put your baby in an approved car safety seat every time she is in the car.

## Your Baby's Characteristics

### Your Baby's Appearance

All babies have their own size, shape, coloring and markings. There are some shapes or markings on your baby that will go away soon after birth. Some of these include:

#### Skin

- ▶ Bluish coloring of hands and feet in the first few days after birth
- ▶ Blotchy red areas over entire body called a newborn rash. This goes away on its own.
- ▶ Small white spots called milia. These are mainly found on the nose and chin. These usually go away within a few weeks to a few months.
- ▶ Dry, peeling skin. This is a natural process when the skin is replaced. Do not use creams and lotions.
- ▶ Small, red birth marks. They are often found at the back of the neck, on the forehead, around the nose or on the eyelids. These are called stork bites. They may begin to fade within weeks and usually go away completely by one year of age.
- ▶ Bluish markings on the body called mongolian spots.

### Your Baby's Temperature

A baby's normal temperature range is 36.5 degrees Celsius to 37.4 degrees or 97.7 degrees Fahrenheit to 99.3 degrees Fahrenheit. One sign of your baby's good health is her temperature in this normal range.

If you are worried about your baby's temperature take it by following these steps:

1. Put the thermometer high up, in the middle of your baby's arm pit.
2. Gently hold your baby's arm down over the thermometer so it does not slip.
3. If using a thermometer with a silver fluid in it called mercury, wait five minutes and then read the temperature. If using a digital thermometer, hold it in place for at least 4 minutes and then read it. Ignore the beeps that happen before four minutes.

## Your Baby's Weight

Your baby may lose up to ten percent of her birth weight during the first week of life. Babies are born with extra fluid so some weight loss is expected.

## Your Baby's Pee (Urination) and Poo (Stools)

In the first three days of life, one to two wet diapers per day is normal. During this time your baby may not wet her diapers for 16 to 24 hours. If you are worried please talk to your nurse, doctor or midwife. After the first three to four days of life, at least 4 to 5 wet diapers in 24 hours is a sign your baby is getting enough food.

All babies pass a dark, sticky stool called meconium for the first few stools. Meconium is followed by a brownish-green stool, which usually then becomes yellow. The color, consistency, and frequency of stools varies among babies. This depends on whether your baby is breast or bottle fed.

Breastfed babies' stools are usually yellow, soft, seedy and unformed. Formula fed babies have more formed yellow stools. Off and on your baby's stools may be a greenish color. This is usually normal. Most babies, six weeks and under, have one to two stools a day. Sometimes a breastfed baby may go longer without having stool. This is normal as long as your baby is comfortable and the stool is soft when she has one.

## Caring for Your Baby

### Bathing Your Baby

Except the diaper area, bathing need only be done once every few days. **If** you choose to use soap, use one that does not have any dyes or perfumes in it. Wash baby's face first. Then wash her hair, body and diaper area. Rinse her well with clear water after using soap so her sensitive skin is not irritated. Dry her well, especially in the creases.

#### *Helpful Hints:*

- ▶ **The hot water temperature in your home should not be more than 120° F (49° C).**
- ▶ If you bath your baby in a sink, turn the taps off tightly. If possible push the faucet to the back of the sink. Always turn the cold water off last so that the faucet remains cool.

### Cord Care

Keep your baby's cord clean and dry until it falls away from the belly button. Clean the cord using water and cotton tip applicators or cotton balls at bath or diaper changing time. Place the diaper below the belly button to allow the cord to air dry. The cord usually falls off between five to fifteen days.

Call your doctor or midwife right away if you see any redness or swelling around the belly button area.

## **Diapering Your Baby**

There are two basic types of diapers, disposables and cloth. Disposable diapers are made of paper, chemicals and plastic. You throw them away after one use. Cloth diapers are woven cotton and can be washed and reused. If you want to use cloth diapers but not have to wash them you can use a diaper service. Look up diaper service in the “Yellow Pages” or on the internet at [www.411.ca](http://www.411.ca)

### *Helpful Hints:*

No matter what kind of diaper you use:

- ▶ Check diaper often for wetness while baby is awake. Change your baby if diaper is wet.
- ▶ Have all the supplies you need at the baby’s change area. It is more efficient to change a baby near a source of warm water. Setting up a change area in your bathroom is a good idea.
- ▶ Always clean your baby’s bottom from front to back.
- ▶ Wipe your baby’s bottom with a damp cloth, then pat dry or air dry.
- ▶ Do not use powder. It is not needed. It may harm baby’s lungs.
- ▶ Always wash your hands after each diaper change.
- ▶ Air dry baby’s bottom after bathing.
- ▶ When the baby’s bottom is clean and dry, you may apply a thin layer of zinc-based diaper cream or skin barrier cream to protect the skin.

## **Dressing Your Baby**

Keeping your baby warm and protecting her from the cold and heat is the main goal in deciding how to dress your baby.

### **When your baby is inside:**

- ▶ With the temperature at 20 to 22 degrees Celsius or 68 to 72 degrees Fahrenheit your baby needs the same amount of clothing as you.
- ▶ When your baby is sleeping add an extra layer such as one blanket. Do not over wrap her.

### **When your baby is outside in the summer:**

- ▶ Dress your baby so her skin is protected from direct sunlight. Babies have sensitive skin and can burn quickly. Use a hat with a brim to protect her head and face. Use loose lightweight clothing to protect her body yet not cause overheating.

### **When your baby is outside in the winter:**

- ▶ Always put a hat on your baby to prevent heat loss.
- ▶ Keep your baby’s hands and feet covered.

### *Other Helpful Hints:*

- ▶ Feel the back of your baby’s neck to tell if she is too hot or too cold.
- ▶ Protect your baby from direct drafts by dressing her in a sweater and using a blanket.
- ▶ Ensure her clothes are comfortable and large enough to let her move freely.
- ▶ Put your baby in the car seat wearing her usual clothes. Once the harness is done up then put a blanket over top. Do not dress her in bulky clothing and wrapped in blankets in the car seat.

- ▶ Wash clothes using a mild, non-perfumed soap. Rinse them twice to remove all the soap. Do not use fabric softener.

## Care of Finger and Toe Nails

Take special care when trimming finger and toe nails. It can be easy to accidentally hurt your baby's skin. You can buy special scissors to cut baby's nails at most drug stores.

You may find that the best time to trim the nails is while your baby is sleeping and relaxed. Simply snip the "free" portion of the nail straight across. Do not try to shape the nail, rip the nail, or cut the nail too close to the base.

## Soothing Your Baby

Healthy babies can cry a lot in their first five months of life. When babies are about two weeks old they may start to cry more and more. This may last until they are about 2 months old. This is normal. Hearing your baby crying can be very upsetting. This is normal too. Remember crying is one of the ways your baby tells you what she needs.

Your baby cries for many reasons. Some of the reasons could be she is:

- ▶ uncomfortable because of wet diapers, gas pains, clothes too tight or a thread is around toes and fingers
- ▶ too hot or too cold
- ▶ bored
- ▶ needing to sleep
- ▶ hungry

Read your Purple Crying pamphlet and watch the DVD.

**NEVER** shake or hurt your baby. It is OK to feel frustrated when you cannot stop her from crying. Put your baby in a safe place and take a few minutes to calm yourself. Breathe deeply. When you feel better go back to check on her. Ask for help from your partner, family and friends.

Your baby may be able to calm herself. Watch how your baby usually soothes herself and do something like it when you help sooth her.

- ▶ Does she respond to your voice, to your touch or to both?
- ▶ Does she like to be cuddled or left alone?
- ▶ What kind of music does she quiet to?
- ▶ Does she like motion such as a car or buggy ride?

## Your Baby's Senses

Your baby's senses are not fully developed but she can see, hear, feel, taste, and smell.

### Vision

- ▶ Your baby sees things clearly one to two hand lengths away or 18 to 45 centimeters from her face for short periods of time. Your baby cannot see things far away.
- ▶ Your baby likes to look at human faces, objects with sharp outlines, patterns, and bright colors. She also likes to look at objects that have contrasting colors.

#### *Helpful Hints to Play with Your Baby Using Her Vision*

- ▶ You are most interesting for your baby to look at. Remember she sees you best when your face is two to three hand lengths or 18 to 45 centimeters from her face.
- ▶ Babies can be more sensitive and easily irritated in the first week of life. Keeping play times short helps. Just a few minutes maybe long enough for her.
- ▶ Begin showing your baby different things when she is in the quiet alert state. The best time is often before she is fed.
- ▶ Your baby may like black and white pictures that you draw yourself. Draw faces, a checkerboard, or geometric designs.

### Hearing

- ▶ Your baby tells the difference between voices, and sounds she does and does not know.
- ▶ Your baby may tune out sounds if she wishes.
- ▶ Your baby remembers sounds she heard in the womb.

#### *Helpful Hints to Play with Your Baby Using Her Hearing*

- ▶ Your baby may settle well by listening to audio tapes of your voice talking softly, or soft instrumental music.
- ▶ Have your baby listen to many different sounds and find out what she prefers.
- ▶ If your baby does not respond to any sound call your doctor.

### Touch

- ▶ Touch is the first sense to develop.
- ▶ The lips and hands are most sensitive to touch.
- ▶ Most babies like skin to skin contact, cuddling and closeness.
- ▶ Your baby likes feeling different textures.
- ▶ Some babies put their own hand to their mouths. This is a way for your baby to comfort herself.

#### *Helpful Hints on Stimulating Sense of Touch*

- ▶ Leave your baby's hands free so she can bring a hand to her mouth.
- ▶ Find out what comforts your baby.
- ▶ Hold your baby skin to skin.



## **Taste**

- ▶ Even before birth your baby can tell the difference between tastes.
- ▶ Most babies show they like sweet tastes and dislike tastes that are salty, bitter, or sour.

## **Smell**

- ▶ Newborns know different smells.
- ▶ Your baby remembers and knows smells. Especially those of her mother.

## **Your Baby's Behaviour**

Your baby is a unique person. She tells you her needs by changing her activities. Babies have six types of activities or states.

1. Quiet sleep
2. Active sleep
3. Drowsy
4. Quiet alert
5. Active alert
6. Crying

Your baby moves from state to state to tell you her changing needs. The length of time a baby spends in each state varies from baby to baby. Understanding each state helps you meet your baby's needs. Each state is listed on the next page with some of the things you may see your baby do while she is in that state. There are also tips you can use when your baby is in each state.

<b>SIX STATES</b>	<b>CHARACTERISTICS</b>	<b>TIPS</b>
<b>Quiet/Deep Sleep</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Very little body movement</li> <li>▶ Very little eye movement under closed eyelids.</li> <li>▶ Regular breathing pattern</li> <li>▶ Difficult waking baby.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Okay to carry on noisy activities around baby.</li> <li>▶ Not a good time to interact, play or feed.</li> </ul>
<b>Active/Light Sleep</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Lots of body movements</li> <li>▶ Eye movement under closed eyelids</li> <li>▶ Makes faces and noises</li> <li>▶ Breathing irregular</li> <li>▶ Hunger or bowel movement may cause him/her to waken</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Baby may go back to sleep if awake and you do not disturb her.</li> <li>▶ If room is noisy, baby may wake up.</li> </ul>
<b>Drowsy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Activity varies from being quite still to quite active.</li> <li>▶ Eyes may open and close</li> <li>▶ Breathing is irregular</li> <li>▶ Responses are slow</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Waken baby by talking to her or touching her</li> <li>▶ Help her sleep by leaving her in a quiet room</li> </ul>
<b>Quiet / Alert</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Eyes wide open, bright and shining</li> <li>▶ Interested in surrounding</li> <li>▶ Breathing is regular</li> <li>▶ Minimal body movements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Good time to play and talk with your baby</li> <li>▶ Good time to feed your baby</li> <li>▶ Introduce toys</li> </ul>
<b>Active / Alert</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Awake and active</li> <li>▶ Eyes open but baby is not attentive</li> <li>▶ Regular breathing</li> <li>▶ Very sensitive to soiled diapers, hunger, being tired</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Take care of whatever is bothering your baby</li> <li>▶ She may enjoy being physically active.</li> </ul>
<b>Crying</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Crying, upset</li> <li>▶ Irregular breathing</li> <li>▶ Increased body movements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Take care of the problem (soiled diapers, boredom, being tired). Read to “Soothing Your Baby” section.</li> </ul>

**Developed by:** Postpartum Family Education Subcommittee, April 1989  
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