

CHAPTER 15

The first weeks after the birth

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# The first weeks after the birth

## CHAPTER 15

In the first few days and weeks after the birth, the mother's body will start to heal. Her womb should get smaller and stop bleeding. Her milk should come in. The baby should learn to breastfeed normally and start to gain weight.

The mother and baby will still benefit from your care after the birth. Visit them at least 2 times — the day after the birth, and then again at least once in the following week. If you visit even more, you may prevent more problems. Visit every day if there are signs of problems in the mother or baby.



## What to do for the mother

Mothers need care after birth just as babies do, but they usually do not ask for it. Remind the family to help the mother heal after birth.

## Help the mother care for herself

After birth, the mother's body is tired and her womb is open. It is easy for her to get infected, but she can stay healthy by:

- getting plenty of rest.
- eating a variety of nutritious foods (see pages 33 to 42).
- drinking plenty of fluids.
- staying clean — washing her hands, genitals, and breasts.

In some cultures, women rest in bed with their babies for 2 weeks or more after a birth. This is a healthy custom because it helps the mother heal, helps her and her baby to be closer, and keeps the mother away from germs outside of her home. If possible, the mother should not do difficult work for about 6 weeks. But she should be sure to walk around a little each day even if she is mostly resting.

Remind the woman and her partner that they should wait until the woman stops bleeding before they have sex. Also be sure to talk to the couple about family planning because the woman can become pregnant again soon.

## Watch the mother's womb and bleeding

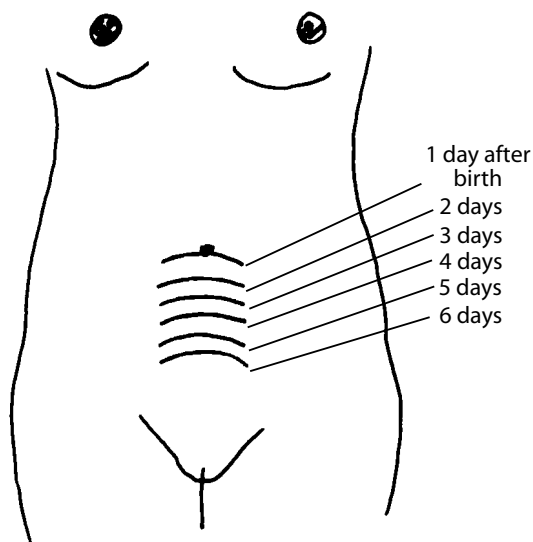
**HEALTHY SIGNS** After the birth, the mother should bleed about the amount of a normal monthly bleeding or less. Her bleeding should stop after 2 or 3 weeks but may last as long as 6 weeks.

Her womb should be firm and get smaller and smaller each day.

### WARNING SIGNS

- Womb feels soft or large.
- Mother bleeds a lot.
- Mother has signs of shock.

Check this chart to see where the top of the womb should be after the birth.



### The mother's womb

If the womb gets soft, rub it until it is firm (see page 224). Show the woman's family how they can rub the womb when you are not there. Ask the mother to breastfeed more often, and watch for too much bleeding.

Also, feel the womb to be sure it is going down to its normal size. Just after birth, the womb is about halfway between the pubic bone and the bellybutton. The next day, it grows to the height of the bellybutton, and should shrink every day after that.

### The mother's bleeding

If the mother soaks more than 1 pad in an hour, she is probably bleeding too much. Rub the womb to help it contract. Remind the family that the mother needs to rest. Working too much often causes bleeding after a birth.



If these methods do not work, give medicines to stop bleeding (see page 231). If the bleeding continues, or if the mother has signs of shock, get medical help right away.

## Watch the mother for signs of womb infection

**HEALTHY SIGNS** normal temperature — around 37°C (98.6°F).

### WARNING SIGNS

- Fever, 38°C (100.4°F) or higher
- Chills
- Fast pulse
- Heavy bleeding
- Bad-smelling genitals or bleeding
- Pains in the belly
- An ill feeling



If a woman has any of these signs after a birth, she may have a womb infection. Womb infections are very dangerous — they can quickly kill a woman.

If possible, a woman who may have a womb infection should go to a medical center right away. She can be tested to find out which antibiotic medicines will cure her infection. If you cannot get medical help, treat the woman at home.

### Giving antibiotics at home

You cannot be sure which germs are causing a womb infection, so you will need to give 4 antibiotics to kill many different germs. If you do not have all of these antibiotics, it is better to give only 1 or 2 than none at all.

Give the antibiotics until the signs of infection have been gone for 2 days. This may take about 5 days altogether.

#### To treat womb infection

- inject 80 mg gentamicin..... in the muscle,  
3 times a day for about 5 days
  - and*
  - give 2 g ampicillin..... in the muscle or by mouth for the first dose,  
then give 1 g ampicillin..... 4 times a day for about 5 days
  - and*
  - give 400 to 500 mg metronidazole..... by mouth, 3 times a day, for about 5 days
- Give these medicines until the woman has had no fever for 2 days (48 hours).



**WARNING!** If the woman does not start to feel better within 1 or 2 days, she may have pieces of the placenta still in her womb. These will need to be removed. Keep giving her antibiotics and take her to a hospital.

## Watch the mother for signs of vaginal infection

**HEALTHY SIGNS** Any tears in the vagina are healing, and the skin is not swollen or hot.

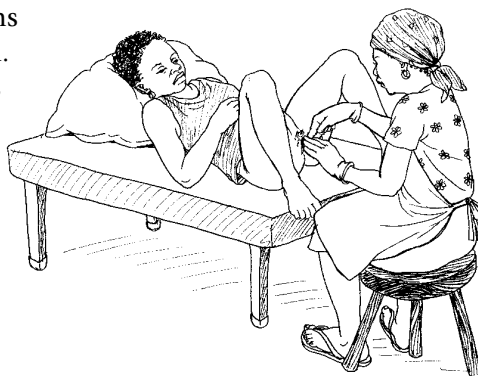
### WARNING SIGNS

- Pain in the vagina
- Pus or a bad smell from the vagina
- Swelling, redness, or a hard lump in the vagina

An infection of the vagina is not as dangerous as a womb infection.

Wash your hands well, put on gloves, and look at the woman's vagina. If you see any of the warning signs listed here, she probably has an infection. If you see pus, check to be sure the pus is not coming from high inside her vagina. If it is, she probably has a womb infection.

If the pus is coming from a hard lump or tear on the woman's genitals, get medical help, or follow these instructions to drain the pus yourself.



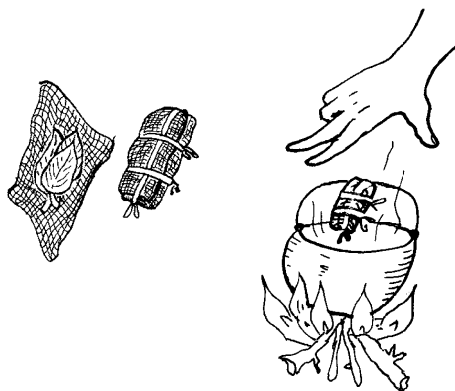
### To drain the pus

Warm, wet cloths will usually draw out pus.

#### *If the tear is open*

Hold sterile cloths dipped in boiled warm water on the infected area.

If you know plant medicines that will draw out pus, wrap them in a sterile piece of cloth or gauze, and tie the cloth so the plants cannot fall out. Boil the wrapped plants, let them cool a little, and then press on the infected area.



#### *If you feel a hard lump under the skin*

If you feel a hard lump, pus or blood is probably trapped inside. Watch the lump each day. If it is painful or growing larger, get medical help.

## Watch for other warning signs

### The mother's legs are red, hard, painful, or swollen

**WARNING SIGNS** Very rarely, after a birth, a woman's blood can form a clot in her leg. Signs of a clot are:

- swelling or heat in one leg or foot.
- pain in one leg when it is squeezed or during walking.
- a painful red area on one leg.
- a hard lump in the leg.



A clot can move to a woman's lung and make breathing impossible.

A blood clot is very dangerous. If the clot breaks free and moves through her blood, it can cause problems in other parts of her body. For example, the clot can go into her lung and make it impossible for her to breathe.

If a woman has a sign of a blood clot, go to a medical center immediately. On the way, have the woman lie down with her legs above her hips and try to stay still. Put warm cloths on the swollen area, but do not rub or massage it. Give aspirin for pain.



### Leaking urine or stool

When urine or stool leaks freely from a woman, she may have a hole in the skin inside her vagina, called a fistula. This hole is caused during labor by the baby's head pressing hard on the skin between the bladder and the vagina, or sometimes the skin between the rectum and the vagina. The pressure of the head is so great that the skin dies and a hole opens up between 3 and 12 days after the birth.

Fistulas can usually be treated. A small fistula may heal on its own: the woman should drink a lot of fluids and take sitz baths (see page 326). If she is catheterized for 3 weeks, urine will be kept out of the fistula long enough for it to heal.

A serious fistula needs to be repaired. There are hospitals that can do this surgery — usually about 3 months after the birth. Help the woman get to a medical center for help.

#### *Fistulas can be prevented*

A fistula happens when a woman is in labor for a long time. When a woman has been in labor for many hours, do not keep waiting. Get medical help. To learn more about preventing fistulas, see page 22.



Fistula causes leaking urine.

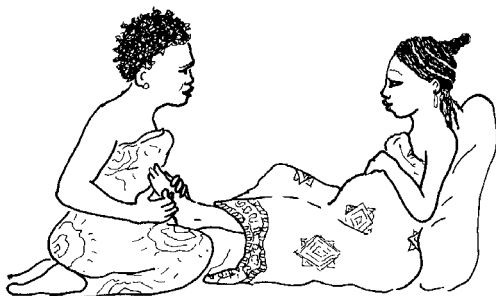
## Give emotional support

It is important to give the mother emotional support. Customs and rituals that honor the mother or celebrate the birth are some ways to recognize her work of childbirth.

### What to do if the mother feels very upset or sad (depressed)

Most women feel strong emotions after giving birth. This is normal. Some feel sad, worried, or less interested in things, sometimes for a few days, and sometimes for weeks or months. When this happens, you can help by listening to the woman's feelings and explaining that her feelings are common. Help her find social support if she does not have it.

When these sad or uninterested feelings are very strong, it is called depression. It may be difficult for the woman to care for herself or her baby. She may even act crazy. A woman who is depressed is ill and needs help. She needs help caring for her home and family, and she needs help to stop feeling so upset. If possible, someone should stay with the woman to help and to be sure she does not harm herself or her baby.



To help a woman feel better, experiment with traditional rituals and remedies, changes in diet or activities, as well as modern medicines. Some medicines are expensive, have side effects, and do not work for everyone.

A woman who had feelings like this after a previous birth is more likely to feel them again after this birth.

## What to do for the baby

### Encourage the baby to breastfeed and watch how she grows

The baby should breastfeed every few hours, from the first hour after the birth on. A baby who is breastfeeding enough and who is healthy should urinate and pass stool within the first 24 hours after birth, and regularly after that. She should not have signs of dehydration, and should gain weight. Keep the baby warm and dry, and play with her.



## Baby has signs of dehydration

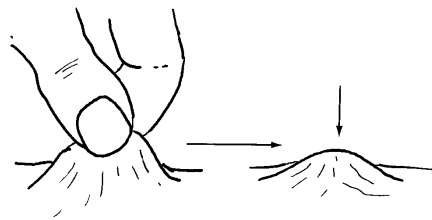
If the baby is not breastfed enough, if she has diarrhea or vomits, or if she has a fever, she can become dehydrated. Dehydration happens when there is not enough water in the body. It is very dangerous, and can kill a baby.

Signs of dehydration:

- sunken soft spot
- sunken eyes
- dry mouth or cracked lips
- urinating less than 4 times a day
- dark-colored urine
- fast pulse and breathing
- skin that is not stretchy



To check the stretchiness of the skin, pinch the skin on your own arm and let it go. Watch how quickly it goes back to normal. Now pinch the skin on the baby's belly and let it go. If the baby's skin goes back to normal more slowly than yours did, she is dehydrated.



### To help a dehydrated baby

Encourage the mother to breastfeed often — every 1 to 2 hours. Also give the baby rehydration drink (see page 160) — a few drops each minute until the baby is better.

Dehydration can be caused by infection (see pages 277 to 279). If the baby is not better in 4 hours, get medical help.

### Bottle-feeding causes dehydration

A common cause of diarrhea and dehydration is giving formula to a baby. If possible, the mother should breastfeed. If she cannot breastfeed, the family must use clean water and the correct amount of formula powder. Bottles and nipples must be boiled to be safe. See page 281 to learn more about formula.





## Baby does not gain weight or grow normally

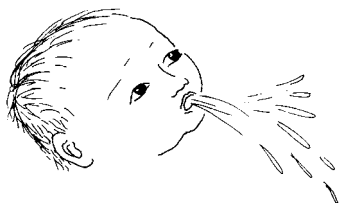
It is normal for a baby to lose weight for a few days after birth. But she should regain her birth weight by 2 weeks and continue to gain weight steadily. A baby who does not gain weight or grow enough may not be getting enough milk. She may also have an infection, diarrhea, or another health problem.

Watch how often the baby breastfeeds. The mother should feed the baby whenever he wants, for as long as he wants — at least every 2 or 3 hours for at least 20 minutes, until the breast is empty. If the baby does not try to breastfeed often, she may be very sick. Take her to a medical center right away.

Watch the mother's health. If the mother is ill or not getting enough good food or fluids, she may not feel like feeding the baby enough. Encourage the family to care for the mother and give her extra food. And encourage the mother to be tested for HIV.

See Chapter 16 to learn more about breastfeeding. If the baby just does not grow, get medical advice.

## Baby “shoots” vomit



Most babies spit up (vomit a small amount). Usually, the vomit dribbles out of the baby's mouth, especially after eating.

If vomit “shoots” forcefully out of the baby's mouth each time she eats, she may have an infection or something blocking milk from moving through her body. Get medical advice.

## Encourage immunization

Immunizations (vaccines) protect children from many dangerous diseases, and when most children are vaccinated, fewer illnesses spread that can cause birth defects during pregnancy. The most important vaccines for young babies are DPT (for diphtheria, whooping cough and tetanus), polio, hepatitis B, Hib (for Haemophilus influenza), PCV (pneumococcal vaccine), RV (rotavirus), and BCG (for tuberculosis). Each country has its own schedule for giving these vaccines and they are usually free. Most vaccines are started when a baby is about 2 months old.

Encourage the mother to take the baby to the nearest health center.



## The baby needs medicine if the mother has HIV

Giving ART medicines will protect a baby from becoming infected with HIV if his mother has HIV. This medicine should be started within 72 hours after the baby is born. See page 499 for more information. When the baby is 6 weeks old, he should also start taking a medicine called cotrimoxazole to prevent infections.

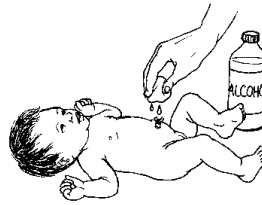
See page 481.

## Care for the cord

To prevent the stump of the baby's cord from getting infected, it should be kept **clean** and **dry**. Show the family how to care for it.

- Always wash your hands before touching the cord.
- If the cord becomes dirty or has a lot of dried blood on it, clean it with soap and boiled (then cooled) water, medical alcohol, strong drinking alcohol, or with gentian violet. Be gentle with the cord.
- Do not put anything else on the cord — dirt and dung are especially dangerous.
- If there are a lot of flies where you live, you may cover the cord stump with a clean dry cloth. But usually you should leave it uncovered.

The cord stump usually falls off 5 to 7 days after the birth. There may be a few drops of blood or smooth mucus when the cord falls off. This is normal. But if there is a lot of blood or any pus, get medical help.



If you clean the cord, be gentle.

## Look for signs of infection

### WARNING SIGNS

- The baby seems very weak or tired, or stops breastfeeding.
- The baby has diarrhea.
- The baby cannot keep warm, even when wrapped in blankets.
- The baby has a fever above 38°C (100.4°F).
- The baby has a weak, fast heartbeat.
- The baby breathes with difficulty, and more than 60 breaths a minute.
- The baby seems ill.



### *Cord infection*

Infection in a baby is most often caused by germs getting into the cord stump. When the cord is infected, the area around the cord usually becomes red, drains pus, feels hot, or smells bad. If signs are mild, start by cleaning and putting gentian violet on 2 times a day. If it does not improve or gets worse after 1 or 2 days, give the medicines in the box on page 279 or get medical help.

## Tetanus

If the cord was cut with something that was not sterilized, or if someone put dirt or dung on the cord stump, the baby can get tetanus. Even with good care and medicine, most babies who get tetanus will die.



To prevent tetanus, pregnant women must be vaccinated (see page 102), and the cord must be kept clean.

A baby with tetanus will usually be stiff, with her head bent back, and will have very brisk (strong) reflexes. Check the baby's reflexes for signs of tetanus:

Let the leg hang freely and tap it just below the kneecap with your knuckle or finger.



If the leg jumps a little bit, the reaction is normal.



If it jumps a lot, the baby may have tetanus.



**If you see signs of tetanus, get medical help immediately.**

**If medical help is more than 2 hours away**

- inject 100,000 Units benzylpenicillin.....on the outside of the baby's thigh muscle, 1 time only



## Pneumonia (lung infection)

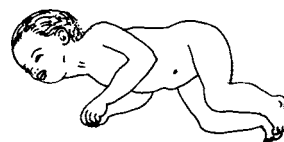


Infection can also happen in the baby's lungs (pneumonia). This is most common if the mother's water broke more than 24 hours before the birth, or if she had a fever during labor.

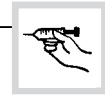
Signs of a lung infection in a baby are: breathing fast (more than 60 breaths a minute) grunting when she breathes, or sucking in the skin between her ribs as she breathes. Get medical help, especially if the baby is small or was born early. On the way, give antibiotics.

## Meningitis (brain infection)

Rarely, a baby becomes infected in the brain (meningitis). A baby with an infection in the brain will have a stiff neck and lie with her head bent back. She may vomit, the soft spot on her head will bulge, and she may become unconscious. A baby with an infection of the brain can quickly die. **Take the baby to a hospital immediately.**



If you have antibiotics, give them on the way to the hospital. See page 279.



### Antibiotics for infections in a newborn

#### such as pneumonia, meningitis, infections of the blood (sepsis) and others

- inject ampicillin ..... in the outside of the baby's thigh muscle,  
2 times a day for a baby up to 6 days old  
3 times a time for a baby 1 week old or more

for a 2 kg or smaller baby:      inject 100 mg

for a 3 kg baby:                      inject 150 mg

for a 4 kg or bigger baby:        inject 200 mg

#### **and**

- inject gentamicin..... in the outside of the baby's thigh muscle, once  
a day

for a 2 kg or smaller baby:      inject 8 mg

for a 3 kg baby:                      inject 15 mg

for a 4 kg or bigger baby:        inject 20 mg

Take the baby to a hospital. If this is not possible, give ampicillin and gentamicin for at least 5 days.

## Watch the color of the baby's skin and eyes

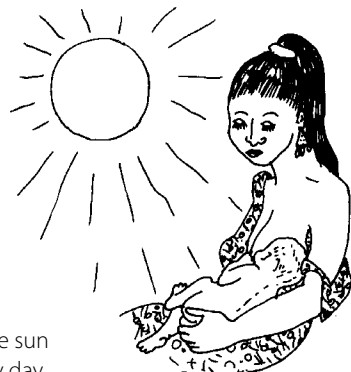
Many babies have a yellow color to their skin or eyes a few days after birth. This is called jaundice. Jaundice is caused when a yellow substance called bilirubin builds up in the baby's body. Normally, a new baby's body breaks the bilirubin down in a few days, and the yellow color goes away.

Rarely, the baby can have severe jaundice, which is dangerous. Signs are:

- The yellow color starts on the first day of the baby's life.
- The yellow color lasts for more than 2 weeks.
- The yellow color extends to the baby's hands or feet.
- The baby seems very sleepy or does not wake up to breastfeed.
- The baby does not stay warm.

If the baby shows any of these signs, get medical help immediately.

Otherwise, help the baby breastfeed often, and give the baby some sun. The sun helps break down the bilirubin. If it is warm enough, take off the baby's clothes, cover her eyes, and put her in the sun for 5 minutes once or twice a day. (Too long will burn the baby's skin.)



Put a yellow baby in the sun for a few minutes every day.