



Your Postnatal Days



“Care of mothers after childbirth is an issue of universal social importance. Good care in the first 6 weeks post-partum is crucial to the mother’s health and wellbeing and can have lasting benefits, not only for her health and the health of her baby, but more widely, for her family and community as well.” Jenny Allison

Congratulations on the birth of your baby!

If this is your first baby, I know this time can feel like a very steep learning curve as you get to know your little one and adjust to your new role as a Mum / Parent. If this is your second, third or more, know that each post-natal period is different, and you and your family are adjusting to the life changes each new precious bundle brings.

Your Birth

I hope that you had a really positive birth experience. It takes time to reflect and process the huge life event of labour and birth, no matter if it was straightforward or not. Your body has been through a physically challenging experience and now is your time to recover. But what is the best way to do that now that this perfect little human needs so much of your time and care?

Rest and Recover

Well, it appears that we in the Western world are not very good at prioritising new Mums / Parents. Nor do we give ourselves the time that we really need to recover. There tends to be a cultural view, that the new Mum who gets back to normal as quickly as possible as the ideal, however did you know that in many countries across the world birthing parents are given a 40 day post-partum period where they are completely looked after? All meals are prepared by other family members, the housework is taken care of, and daily massages and special birthing rituals are carried out to nourish the mother and aid in her recovery.

Whether this sounds blissful to you, or not, I certainly think it’s better than being left to it, shortly after the birth with a new born baby. We often feel under pressure to get out of bed and get ready, hoover and tidy and get the biscuits in for an endless stream of visitors who don’t make their own cups of tea (or load the dishwasher). Some don’t get the hint to leave when you are desperately tired or trying to find the confidence to publicly feed your tired, hungry, over stimulated baby.

Safeguard this precious time as a new family. Stay in bed and do not feel guilty. Don’t rush out to Tesco to soon or feel the pressure to behave as you did pre-baby. This is a really special time where you and your baby are a priority.

Could you ask them hang out some washing, or do a quick tidy round? Could they take the baby for a walk while you nap? **WHAT CAN WAIT?** Are the jobs you want to get done imperative? I know if you’re used to a clean and tidy house, it can feel stressful when it’s less than perfect. The newborn days pass so quickly, So get comfortable with temporarily lowering the bar and letting it wait. There will *always* be time for housework over the years to come.

Taking a break

When your partner finishes work, or your relatives or friends come to visit, can they be on baby duty while you eat something, have a bath, nap or just have some time to be alone with free arms and hands? If baby is having periods or crying or if they are suffering from colic, take turns at holding and walking with baby. A baby crying ‘in arms’ will not be anywhere near as stressed as a baby crying alone. Learning the tummy massage colic routine may help too.

Your Mood

Your pregnancy hormones start to drop dramatically after you have your baby and the common phrase ‘baby blues’ can be a reality at around day 4. It is very common to feel emotional and tearful around this time. Having a baby involves a complete transformation of your body, mind, your life and who you are. Not only is your baby born but you are re-born – as a Mother / Parent. It is an all-consuming emotional rollercoaster and involves extremes of emotion that you may never have experienced anything like before. It is also a time where us Humans were never meant to be alone. So do ask for help when you need to.

Sources of support include your Midwife and Health Visitor, and charities and support groups such as:

JUNO PMS Edinburgh juno.uk.com

Lothian Breastfeeding Buddies (find on facebook)

Breathing Space 0800 838587

Crossreach (counselling by donation) 538 7288

Pregnancy and Parent’s Centre Edinburgh 229 3667

Pregnancy Counselling & Care 5572060 / 07904499320

*I wish you all the very best at this wonderful time in your life,
Nicola xx*

Feed me!

Labour and birth consume a lot of calories and I'm sure you didn't stop for a meal during yours! So you have some making up to do. It's common to feel really hungry, and thirsty in those first few days and weeks. It's a great idea to ask family and friends to bring you food when they visit. This is so much more helpful to you than another bunch of flowers, baby balloons or cute outfits (as lovely as all that may be). Think of high energy, nutritious foods and don't skip meals as this will affect your mood, energy and your milk supply.

Early Days Feeding

80% of Mums start off keen to breastfeed. Sadly, the reality of this statistic dramatically drops in the first few weeks due to lack of support and mixed messages about breastfeeding importance and manageability. Breastfeeding is a learned skill, not necessarily something that comes instinctively. We humans as a species learned how to feed our babies from watching others. What was your family experience before you had your baby? Don't feel bad if you need some help in the beginning. Reach out and get *good* help and support if you are struggling. Feeding your baby yourself should not be painful. Yes it may be a bit tender at times for the first few seconds or minutes of each feed, but a baby with a good latch should not leave you with damaged nipples. Be cautious of topping up with bottles as this can really affect your supply. Some tips:

- Laid back breastfeeding. Lie back on your bed or sofa supported by pillows and pop baby straight up and down your chest rather than baby's head cradled in the crook of your elbow. Let baby bob up and down to find the breast. This not only massively stimulates baby's brain, it helps them to get a better latch if they come at the breast this way – bring baby to breast not breast to baby.
- Plenty of skin-to-skin time stimulates your baby's natural feeding instincts.
- Chin first, making sure the lower lip is far away from your nipple and the top lip is *just* over your nipple.
- Your baby's chin should be deep in your breast and their nose should be free.
- Baby's soft palate (the very back of their mouth) should be the



part that the nipple is against. It helps if baby's mouth is slightly under nipple before they open up.

- Open wide – baby needs to get a decent mouthful of breast tissue, so your nipple sits further back in baby's mouth. This avoids your nipple being rubbed on their hard palate which can be the source of discomfort, sores and cracked skin.
- Make sure baby can tilt their head back slightly and your hand isn't restricting their natural head movements while feeding.
- Hot and cold packs. Once your milk comes in, your breasts can feel swollen and tender. Try a warm compress or shower and gently hand express to release some milk. Use cold packs in between feeds or savoy cabbage leaves out of the fridge, to increase your comfort levels.
- A new born baby may want fed every hour or so. If they have times when they are fussing a lot at the breast – this is normal and does not mean you don't have enough milk for them. They are very cleverly using this behaviour to increase your milk supply. Use some relaxation techniques to help you feel calmer though these times. Periods of fussiness at the breast are normal and require your trust and often your patience. Use your checklist for monitoring your baby's age and the number or wet/dirty nappies they should be having. See https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/10/mothers_breastfeeding_checklist.pdf
- If there are no concerns about baby's health, settle in and relax. Make sure you've got the remote control and snacks nearby! If you've got an older child, have them cuddle up beside you for stories or the odd movie. And call in back up from your partner, relatives or friends when you can. Baby will slow down eventually.

Bonding

Our bonding stories with our babies are all unique. We mostly hear about 'love at first sight' and can feel guilt or worry if you didn't feel that rush of love that you were expecting to. A difficult birth

experience among other personal circumstances can affect how you feel when you meet your baby. It is more common than you'd think so do not ever blame yourself for any feelings of indifference. The lovely thing about bonding is that LOVE GROWS. Try bathing with your baby, have plenty skin to skin, gaze at them, and just give yourself time to rest together and recover from the birth. Those feelings will start to flow. Once your baby is 6 weeks old, a regular massage routine will enhance the love even further. It is a great oxytocin boost for you both.

Baby Wearing

Did you get your baby box? Inside is a sling or 'stretchy wrap' which you will want to get familiar with. This extremely long piece of material can be a bit daunting at first and it takes a little bit of practise to wrap it correctly but is well worth it. Your baby wants to be close to you, to feel your heartbeat, your breath, and movements. Being against your body is where they feel safe and content – they don't realise they are a separate entity from you when they are newborns. This is why they often cry when we put them down alone. Be reassured that your baby is not trying to manipulate you in any way when they cry for you. Babies that are held and worn generally cry less. You will also have your hands free, so it is incredibly practical. The stretchy is fantastic for getting baby's legs into a good position. Carriers where their legs dangle down, do not support the hips.

There are plenty of YouTube demos out there to help you. I have one on my Face Book page titled "Scared of your baby box stretchy wrap" where I talk it through step by step. Once baby is in, nice and high and tight, make sure their head is to the side and their chin is not on their chest, so that they have a good air supply. You should be able to easily fit two fingers under their chin.

Daily chores and self-care

It is helpful to think about managing what may have felt like simple daily tasks pre-baby, in three different categories:

WHAT IS A NON-NEGOTIABLE FOR YOU? Is it brushing your teeth, having a shower each day? How can you make sure this is possible? Could your partner get up half an hour earlier and look after the baby while you do what makes you feel more like you?

WHAT CAN YOU ASK FOR HELP WITH? Is there anything you can delegate to helpful friends and family?