

## THE FIRST SIX WEEKS

Full recovery from pregnancy can take several months. The most intense changes occur during the first six weeks. This is usually called the postpartum period.

Involution is the return of the reproductive organs, (particularly the uterus) to the normal size and position. Remember that the uterus was enlarged from 2 ounces to 2 pounds during pregnancy. Immediately after delivery, the uterus feels like a hard lump just below the level of the umbilicus. Gradually the uterus sinks deeper in the pelvis as it diminishes in size and weight. By the tenth day, it can no longer be felt through the abdominal wall. It takes approximately six weeks for the uterus to return completely to the pre-pregnant state. As the uterus shrinks, the lining sloughs off and results in a bloody discharge called lochia. At first, the vaginal flow is very heavy and bloody. As healing takes place, the flow becomes a reddish-brown color and eventually a whitish color. The lochia usually lasts about 10 days-6 weeks. The contractions which help the uterus return to normal are called afterpains. They may continue for several days. If a woman breast feeds, the contraction-like cramps in the uterus are intensified by the hormone oxytocin. This hormone is produced when a baby nurses and helps speed involution.

Early ambulation (getting up and walking around), helps restore circulation and muscle tone. Most women are encouraged to get out of bed a few hours after delivery. The mother is also instructed to use some simple exercises to begin to restore her muscle tone. The abdominal muscles are voluntary and do not return to normal as quickly as the involuntary muscles of the uterus.

If an episiotomy was performed (a surgical cut that widens the opening of the vagina), your doctor may recommend Sitz baths, heat lamp treatments, or an anesthetic spray to ease the discomfort.

As a result of the shifting hormones following the birth of a baby, some mothers experience a phenomenon called postpartum depression or baby blues. This period may only last a day or two and may occur anytime during the first few weeks after delivery. Sixty to eighty percent of new mothers feel a certain amount of moodiness. Realizing that this is normal and that it will pass, makes an enormous difference. However, if the blues are severe or prolonged, a doctor should be contacted.

### DISCHARGE FROM THE HOSPITAL

Early discharge from the hospital has become a common practice. The hospital stay is usually 1-3 days, unless problems arise.

It is important to remember that the mother may not automatically love this demanding little bundle of energy. Sometimes this makes a mother feel guilty and confused. Many mothers develop a feeling of inadequacy as they face the task of 24 hour-a-day, seven-days-a-week care.

### THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF PARENTHOOD

Much attention has been paid to the conflicts that may occur as a woman enters the role of motherhood. Maternal love is incorrectly thought to be instinctive. For some mothers this feeling occurs only as they care for the baby over a period of time. Fathers, too, may need a period of time before admitting love for this helpless baby. The father may become jealous and resentful of the time his wife must spend caring for the child. He, too, needs to be involved in developing his fatherhood role. He should be encouraged to handle the child and help with its care.

Psychologists tell us that changes in our lives require adjustments and that generally causes stress.