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CAESAREAN BIRTH

If a mother is unable to birth her baby vaginally, a Caesarean birth will be necessary. Although a Caesarean birth can be life-preserving for the mother and/or fetus, surgery does present increased risks. Mothers are at a 3.6 times higher risk of death, more likely to suffer from a stroke, and more likely to be readmitted to a hospital when compared to a vaginal birth. Infants are 1.5 times more likely to die during caesarean birth than vaginal birth, even when the procedure has no other risk factors.

The mother's recovery from birth is longer, more complicated, and more painful because of the major surgery involved; mother is exposed to medications and may be at risk for impaired bonding with their infants, compromising breastfeeding. (Smith, 2010, pp. 156-158)

Indications:

Caesarean birth may be planned based on known risk factors:

- breech
- placenta previa
- incompetent cervix
- large for gestational age baby; not fitting through pelvis/birth canal
- multiple births

Caesarean birth may be a result of maternal/fetal complications during labour & birth:

- labour failing to progress
- fetal distress
- fever in mother
- dilation retraction

Evidence of the impact of caesarean birth on breastfeeding rates (Prior et al, 2012)

- Women who gave birth by caesarean are less likely to breastfeed during birth hospitalization
- Women who gave birth by caesarean without going into labour were less likely to breastfeed during their hospital stay compared to vaginal birth mothers
- Among mothers who started breastfeeding, the rate of both exclusive and any breastfeeding at 6 months was the same for those who gave birth vaginally or by caesarean.

BREASTFEEDING AFTER A CAESAREAN BIRTH

In 2013/2014, Peel Health partnered with Trillium Health Partners in an Executive Training for Research Application (EXTRA) Fellowship project. One goal of this project is to increase breastfeeding exclusivity at hospital discharge by a minimum of 20 percent for healthy-term infants born by Caesarean birth.

Client and staff education, interventions (prenatally, in hospital and post-discharge) and increased supports for this targeted group of families are being implemented.

This project is in progress at the time of writing this protocol and evaluation processes will look at the effectiveness of the identified strategies.

COMMON CHALLENGES

Families with healthy term babies giving birth by caesarean commonly face the following challenges:

IN HOSPITAL

- Delayed or limited skin-to-skin contact because of surgery, health of baby or mother
- Concern about having enough breast milk to feed baby
- Baby wants to feed often, cries and is difficult to settle
- Mother has post-op pain and has difficulty moving around
- Mother may be uncomfortable when holding and breastfeeding her baby

Client education and interventions during the hospital stay will be targeted at:

- Early skin-to-skin as soon as possible after birth
- Establishing early exclusive breastfeeding
- Baby's adjustment to life after birth
- Maintaining mother's comfort level post-op

DURING THE FIRST WEEKS HOME

- Concern about keeping up with baby's breastfeeding needs
- Difficulty getting baby latched onto breast
- Family feels overwhelmed and tired with the adjustment of being home and caring for a new baby
- Mother continues to have post-op pain and has difficulty moving around

Assessment

Breastfeeding after Caesarean Birth

- Mother continues to have difficulty holding and breastfeeding her baby because of discomfort
- Family has many questions and are unsure where to get help

EDUCATION AND SUPPORT FOR PARENTS AFTER DISCHARGE FROM HOSPITAL

The Public Health Nurse can educate and support post-caesarean birth families as they learn to deal with these challenges commonly faced during the early days.

A) Concern about keeping up with baby's breastfeeding needs; Difficulty getting baby latched onto breast

Inform family that:

- Breasts will feel full 3-6 days after baby is born and this will last for about 24 hours
- Infrequent feedings and intravenous fluids during surgery may result in the breasts becoming hard and enlarged, making it difficult for baby to latch on
- Baby will need to breastfeed more often when going through a growth spurt at about 2-3 weeks. Mother's breasts will make the right amount of milk for baby.
- Healthy breastfed babies need a daily dose of 400 IU of Vitamin D for the first year of life

What mother can do:	What father / partner / support person can do:
<p>Know it is important to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ask family to bring baby to her to feed even if she is resting or sleeping • remind her family about her wishes to give baby only breast milk • continue breastfeeding skin-to-skin • breastfeed when baby shows early feeding signs • listen for baby's swallowing while feeding • count baby's wet and dirty diapers 	<p>Know it is important to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bring baby to mother to breastfeed even when she is resting/sleeping • support mother's decision to breastfeed • limit visitors that are unsupportive • recognize when the baby is ready to breastfeed • know the signs that baby is getting enough

Assessment

Breastfeeding after Caesarean Birth

What mother can do:	What father / partner / support person can do:
<p>Understand that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> babies need to breastfeed 8 or more times in 24 hours frequent feedings help to produce the right amount of milk her breasts will feel softer after breastfeeding she has a breastfeeding plan; with support and understanding, she can get through any challenges <p>She should get help if she:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> has a hard time latching her baby on breast has sore nipples notices a red, sore, hot area on her breast 	<p>Provide support to the mother by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> doing or asking others to help with household tasks so mother can rest and breastfeed caring for baby <p>Remember to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> maintain a calm and quiet environment change and count the number of wet and dirty diapers

If mother's breasts feel hard ([engorged](#)) and latching is difficult, encourage her to try the following before feeding to help soften the breasts:

- Cool compress to decrease swelling OR
- Warm shower/compresses to help soften breast
- Massage breast gently and hand express some milk

B) Family feels overwhelmed and tired with the adjustment of being home and caring for a new baby

Inform family that:

- All new parents find the first few weeks challenging – physically and emotionally
- Parents often feel stress after bringing baby home. Caring for a new baby means not only less sleep, but also less time to spend their partner
- Babies can begin to have fussy periods with crying that starts around 2-3 weeks and may last until about 6 weeks of age

Assessment

Breastfeeding after Caesarean Birth

- Skin-to-skin helps to comfort mother and baby and promotes breastfeeding
- Comforting baby teaches baby that the parent/caregiver is there to meet baby's needs
- Spending as much time, as possible, with baby develops confidence in responding to baby's needs

What mother can do:	What father / partner / support person can do:
<p>Know it is important to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rest when baby is sleeping; let the household tasks wait • give herself permission to take time throughout the day to rest • enjoy holding, talking and singing to baby <p>Understand that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the first days home from the hospital are an important time of adjustment and she isn't expected to know everything • she can successfully cope with breastfeeding like other challenging or new tasks • there may be times she feels tired and frustrated, but never shake baby <p>Ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a family member, or friend that she trusts, to look after her baby if she feels she needs a break • to have baby brought to her to breastfeed when baby is ready to eat • a Public Health Nurse, your midwife or contact your hospital breastfeeding clinic to answer questions and help her gain the confidence to know she is meeting her baby's needs 	<p>Know it is important to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rest and eat healthy food • take time to be together as a family • be patient with each other as they adjust to their new roles • decide what household tasks can wait <p>Remember to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accept offers for help • ask a family member, or friend that they trust, to look after baby if they feel they need a break • never shake baby • recognize that breastfeeding takes time • continue to support mother's decision to feed baby only breast milk

Assessment

Breastfeeding after Caesarean Birth

**C) Mother continues to have post-op pain and has difficulty moving around;
Mother continues to have difficulty holding and breastfeeding her baby because of discomfort**

Inform family that:

- It is important to follow the doctor's instructions once mother goes home including taking pain medication if it is needed
- It is easier to take care of baby if the family takes steps to take care of themselves
- It can be helpful to have someone to help mother at home

What mother can do:	What father / partner / support person can do:
<p>Know it is important to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continue to take pain medication as mother needs it • take care of herself <p>Remember:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to follow mother's hospital discharge instructions • to try different breastfeeding positions such as, football and side-lying positions which may be more comfortable with an abdominal incision • it is okay to ask for help <p>Ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • her doctor, midwife or nurse if she has questions about medication 	<p>Remember to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • spend time with mother while she breastfeeds • be patient, understanding and encouraging • be aware of any increase in the mother's pain level and contact her health care provider as needed <p>Give practical help to mother:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • help mother try different breastfeeding positions that are comfortable for feeding baby

D) Family has many questions and are unsure where to get help

Inform the family about [breastfeeding resources available](#) in the Region of Peel.

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