

The Post - Natal Mother

With the excitement and exhaustion of the first few days and weeks with a new baby, the mother's needs are often overlooked. It is easy to forget that the mother's body is going through some major changes as it recovers from pregnancy and birth.

Physical recovery from pregnancy and childbirth is not always straightforward and is often incomplete if the physical demands of the pregnancy have been great or the birth difficult. This can lead to a wide range of problems both in the short term and in the long term, many of which can be prevented from the appropriate treatment. Osteopathy has a very important place in helping a new mother to recover physically and mentally from pregnancy and birth.

Common health issues in the post-natal period may include:

- Spinal, hip and pelvis aches and pains.
- Abdominal discomfort following a Caesarian section.
- Diastasis Recti - Rectus abdominus muscles split and cause a large indent within the stomach, this weakens the stomach muscles and may cause low back pain and pelvis instability.
- Perineal, pelvic floor and coccyx discomfort.
- Breast, shoulder and wrist soreness associated with feeding the baby.
- Tiredness.
- Headaches.
- Post-natal depression.
- Urinary stress incontinence, Bowel problems, Hemorrhoids.

Muscle pains in any part of the body are common in the first few days after childbirth due to the physical effort of delivery. Stresses and strains that were present in pregnancy that hadn't been resolved will take some time to recover. Labour takes its toll on the mother whether it is straight forward or not. Any intervention i.e. Forceps, ventouse, or caesarian sections, all place great stress on the mother's body. Long or short deliveries may place stress through the pelvis, pelvic floor and rib cage, which by sitting feeding the baby for hours never get chance to right themselves. The position the mother is in whilst laboring is important on where the strain may occur, this can lead to pelvic imbalances.

Recommendations are that the post-natal mother should be checked within the first 4-6 weeks after giving birth. An osteopath will look at the overall postnatal posture of women. Any areas of dysfunction or imbalance can be corrected. The soft tissues can be helped to recover. At 3-4 days after birth the Rectus Abdominus muscle separation starts to reduce. In most cases, by 8 weeks, it will have reduced to approx. 2 fingers breadth at the umbilicus, but many find that there is little closure after this time. Therefore getting the correct advice early may aid full recovery.

There are many gentle exercises that can help the muscles to become strong and balanced again. The osteopaths will assess what is appropriate for that woman and what treatment would aid her recovery and give any advice needed. This will all help when preparing for future pregnancies and birth.

Self help tips to prevent back strain whilst caring for a young child.

- Whenever possible, keep your back straight and bend your knees to lift the baby.
- For older children, sit down and invite them to come to you for a cuddle without lifting them up.
- Raise the height of the cot base and/or drop the cot side down until the child is able to sit or stand in the cot.
- For young babies a raised changing surface such as a chest of drawers can minimize the need to bend, but the baby must never be left unattended on such a surface even when tiny and not moving. As the baby gets more mobile, kneeling down with the baby lying on the bed is often a safer way to change nappies.
- Ideally car seats should not be put into the car with the baby already strapped in, because the combined weight of the baby and the awkward angle of the car overloads the mother's spine. Try to carry the baby in and out of the car.
- Try not to carry a child on one hip for long periods of time, where possible use alternate hips. Front slings, or backpacks as the child gets older, can be more comfortable and cause less back problems.
- And remember always ask for help there are always people who can!!!

For any further information or advice please don't hesitate to contact me.

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