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Program of Resources, Information and Support for Mothers



Postnatal Health

A focus on mothers



“Just talking – having someone impartial who listens.”

Pregnancy and giving birth are major events in women’s lives. Giving birth is the most common reason for hospital admission in Australia.

The list of health problems below comes from a survey of over a thousand Victorian women who had recently given birth.

- 69% tiredness
- 44% back pain
- 26% difficulties with sex
- 21% soreness from episiotomy or tear
- 18% relationship problems
- 17% depression
- 17% mastitis
- 13% bowel problems
- 11% urinary incontinence (leakage)
- 11% more coughs and colds than usual
- 8% difficulties with contraception
- 6% constantly reliving the baby’s birth

Almost all women (94%) had experienced one or more of these problems.[#]

Many women are reluctant to mention postnatal problems to health professionals, despite the fact they often would like more advice and assistance in dealing with them.[#]

PRISM encourages women to talk about their own health.

The prompt questions (below), can help to start these discussions.

Emotional

How are YOU feeling in yourself?
How do you find being a mother?

Social

How is your relationship going?
What interests do you have, apart from caring for the baby?
Who shares the work of caring for your baby?
How much time do you get to yourself?

Physical

Pain - perineum, back or breasts?
Haemorrhoids?
Your health - any other problems?
Sex?
Incontinence - urine or faeces?
Coughs and colds
Anaemia
Lack of energy / exhaustion?



PRISM (Program of Resources, Information and Support for Mothers) is a primary care and community based project to improve the physical and emotional health of mothers.

[#] Brown and Lumley (1998) “Maternal health after childbirth : results of an Australian population based survey.” *British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* 105 : 156 – 161

A Focus on Mothers' Health

“We all expected me to be ‘back to normal’ by the 6 week check up. I wasn’t. I still had back pain 6 months later.”

Physical health problems are extremely common in the first year after birth.

There are huge demands placed on a woman's body during the pregnancy, labour and whilst giving birth, and this can take months, and even up to a year to recover.

The body needs time, rest and nurturing to recover.

It is common to feel exhausted and drained in the first few weeks and months. There are the constant demands of being 'on call' 24 hours a day, the lack of sleep, the frequent feeds and just getting used to having a baby at home, and the overwhelming feeling of it all...

“I just didn’t expect to feel so tired for so long.”

Do other women feel the same way?

Yes. Recent research shows just how common it is for women to experience health problems in the first year. The list of health problems below comes from a survey of over a thousand women who had recently given birth. They talked about the sort of things that had been a problem for them in the first six months.

- ◆ 69% tiredness
- ◆ 44% back pain
- ◆ 26% difficulties with sex
- ◆ 21% soreness from episiotomy or tear
- ◆ 18% relationship problems
- ◆ 17% depression
- ◆ 17% mastitis
- ◆ 13% bowel problems
- ◆ 11% urinary incontinence (leakage)
- ◆ 11% more coughs and colds than usual
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- ◆ 6% constantly reliving the baby's birth



Almost all women (94%) had experienced one or more of these problems.

Taking care of you : your own health and well-being

Your health is important too!

As mothers, we often worry about our children's health, but put our own health and recovery on hold.

Here are some suggestions from other mothers about things that helped them regain their health and well-being in the year after giving birth:

*“Let’s face it, everyone knows mothers are the backbone of the family’s health. We need to give **ourselves** permission to look after our own well-being, or everything else falls in a heap.”*

- * **Talk about how you’re feeling** to a friend or relative who you think will be supportive; just talking about what it’s like to be a new mother and the impact it has on your health can make a big difference



- * See if you can **organise some time out for yourself** each week to do something you enjoy - arrange to meet a friend to go for a walk or have a cup of coffee
- * Do a **swap with another mother** so that you each get a couple of hours every other week to go to the hairdresser, have a swim or just spend some time at home alone

- * If your baby is too small to leave, try having a relaxing bath or reading a book **while grandparents or your partner play with the baby** for an hour or two



- * **Talk about your health to your GP or your maternal and child health nurse** - they are there for you, as well as your baby



SUPPORTING
mothers in our
community