

# MANNA MIDWIVES

## 25 Top Tips for a Healthy Pregnancy and Childbirth

### Pregnancy

- 1. Nourish your body.** Eat a variety of healthy foods that include meats, fish, eggs, cheese, yoghurt, legumes, nuts, vegetables, fruits, dairy. Avoid overly processed, sugary and fatty foods. Remember that whatever you eat affects the growth and development of your baby. Take a pregnancy supplement such as Elivit or talk to your midwife about the benefits of Folic Acid and Iodine in early pregnancy.
- 2. Give up bad habits.** Talk to your midwife about support to give up smoking, alcohol or substance abuse. Your midwife can refer you for counselling and additional support to help break the cycle of addiction.
- 3. Feed your mind and spirit.** Enjoy regular and moderate exercise such as walking, swimming and pregnancy yoga. Surround yourself with people who have had positive birth experiences and avoid listening to friends and family's horror birth stories. Become informed about natural birthing techniques. There are some excellent pregnancy and birth books such as Ina May Gaskin's *Guide to Childbirth* and Janet Balaskas' *New Active Birth*. Join a child birth class. The hospital offers free Antenatal classes and encourages you to bring your partner or a friend; this is also an opportunity to meet other new parents-to-be, and to make new friends.
- 4. Respect your body's limitations.** Realise that your body is going through many changes as your baby grows. When you reach your third trimester after 28 weeks your body is working very hard, (cardiac output alone is one and a half times the non-pregnant you). If possible consider leaving work several weeks before your baby is due and take time to relax before the busyness of parenthood takes over.
- 5. Respect your baby's due date.** Don't fixate on baby's due date as this is merely an estimated date. Babies are on time if they are born anywhere between 37 and 42 weeks. If this is your first pregnancy expect that your baby will be born at least a week to 10 days after your estimated due date.



## Birth

**1. Trust your body.** When it comes to birthing your body knows what to do. Remember that the majority of births are natural and without complications as our bodies are wonderfully designed to birth naturally. Let go and let your body do its job.

**2. Calm your mind.** When you are anxious or fearful your body releases adrenalin which hinders the normal progression of labour and magnifies the pain of contractions. Try to remain calm and relaxed. Breathe slowly



and deeply throughout your contractions and relax and rest before the next contraction starts.

**3. Have good support around you.** Ensure that your support partner/people are encouraging and positive as labour establishes and becomes more active. Remember that if your pregnancy has been problem free you will do most of your early labouring at home. Create a comfortable and relaxed environment by keeping the lights low, having minimal noise and switching off annoying distractions such as cell phones. Let your support person deal with phone calls from friends and family,

your job is to relax and focus on getting through your contractions.

Make sure that you keep well hydrated with frequent sips of fluid and keep comfortable by using heat packs and taking a warm bath or long showers.

**4. Be patient.** Remember labour, just like pregnancy takes time. Your baby will arrive on precisely the day and time it chooses so try and keep upbeat and relaxed about the journey.

**5. Pain Relief.** One of the most effective means of pain relief is having a positive and relaxed mindset, having good support around you and having a comfortable and relaxed birth environment. While at home have warm baths or showers and think about hiring a TENS machine. When you get to hospital you may want to use the birth pool and nitrous gas as these do not impact negatively on the progress of labour. If an epidural becomes necessary, your midwife will discuss this with you and arrange for the procedure.

## Breastfeeding

**1. Be informed.** During your pregnancy, be proactive in learning about the art of breastfeeding. Join a breastfeeding workshop through the hospital or get on-line so that newborn latching techniques, colostrum, foremilk

and hind milk are not foreign concepts once your baby is here.

- 2. Be patient.** Realise that baby is as new to breastfeeding as you are and it may take time for you and baby to learn how to latch correctly. Do not become frustrated because you assumed it would all come together within a couple of days.
- 3. Persevere.** Allow three to four weeks for breastfeeding to fully establish as the benefits for both baby and you are well worth your persistence. Seek early advice from your midwife and if you are experiencing difficulties, consider using a lactation consultant.
- 4. Consider good breast care.** Take care of your nipples and help prevent cracking by using a good nipple cream such as Purelan after feeding. Use cold cabbage leaves to soothe engorged breasts when your milk first comes in.
- 5. Be proactive.** If you perceive that your milk production is not adequate to meet your baby's needs, take a supplement such as Blessed Thistle capsules to stimulate your supply. Drink breastfeeding teas and increase your fluid intake as this will also aid lactation. Try to put baby to the breast more frequently and let baby feed longer as this will signal the brain to increase milk production.



## Newborn Behaviour

- 1. Become familiar with baby's feeding cues.** Generally as soon as baby wakes it is time to feed. Be ready to feed as soon as baby wakes and before they become distressed and agitated. Sucking on their hands, opening their mouth wide and turning their head towards the breast are all signals that baby is hungry.
- 2. Know Baby's tired signals.** New born babies all display the same signs of tiredness. These are grimacing frowns, grumpy fussing noises, clenched fistful tense jerky movements of the arms, yawning and flailing limbs and wailing cries. When baby starts to exhibit some of these signs it is important to prepare baby for sleep. Swaddling a newborn makes them feel safe and secure and often helps to settle them for sleep. Use a soft, thin, stretchy fabric such as a muslin or merino wrap to swaddle baby. Ask your midwife to show you how if you are not sure what to do.
- 3. Understand Baby's sleep cycles.** Babies sleep cycles are generally 45 minutes long and sleeps between feeds consist of 2 to 6 cycles. Baby may stir every hour or so but this does not necessarily mean baby is ready to wake. Babies wake for feeding generally every 3 to 5 hours.
- 4. Expect an unsettled period in the day.** Almost every newborn has a time during the 24 hour clock when they are fretful and unsettled for a

few hours. Generally this time is in the late afternoon /early evening (often referred to as "the witching hour"). Try and keep relaxed about this behaviour as baby will grow out of this at around 8 weeks. It may help to bath baby at this time as a warm bath often settles baby and this is something your partner can do to help you.

**5. Winding baby.** New born babies should be burped frequently as their digestive systems take some time after birth to mature. Try and burp baby regularly throughout a feed and ask your midwife for a demonstration of how to do this correctly. A product called Wind Drops or Infacol may also help.

## **Postnatal Self Care**

- 1. Postnatal hospital stay.** If this is your first baby, it is recommended that you stay in hospital for the first two days so you can take advantage of getting plenty of advice and assistance with breastfeeding and mother craft.
- 2. When you go home.** Enlist the support of family and friends to assist you with chores such as washing, shopping, vacuuming etc. Often the first week or so after birth you are adjusting to a lot less sleep as well of the constant demands of a newborn and extra help is invaluable at this time.
- 3. Rest when baby sleeps.** You will be having a lot of broken sleep for several months after birth so try to have naps during the day when baby sleeps. Just taking time out to rest and relax will help to renew your energy.
- 4. Be aware of postnatal depression.** The huge hormonal changes coupled with interrupted sleep can make new mothers susceptible to postnatal depression. This can occur several weeks/months after birth. If you are feeling 'low' for more than a few days and have lost interest in the activities you usually enjoy it is important to talk to some one you trust and seek the advice of a health professional such as your midwife or GP.
- 5. Take care of yourself.** It is important to eat well and rest. Don't be afraid to ask family and friends for help when you need it. Remember it is important to meet your own needs as well as baby's, and you will be a much better mother for it.