# Bed Rest after Childbirth

Going through labor and delivery can be a long and tiring process and recovery may take a while. Right after having a normal birth, you will be on bed rest while your blood pressure, pulse, breathing and temperature (*vital signs*) are monitored by the nurses in the recovery area. They will do this until you are stable and ready to be moved to your hospital room. Sometimes, a longer stay in the post-postpartum recovery area and longer bed rest is needed if you had:

- A general, spinal or epidural anesthetic.
- A long, hard labor and delivery.
- Excessive bleeding.
- Bleeding that required a transfusion.
- A deep and/or severe vaginal or cervical tear.
- A Cesarean section.

Prolonged bed rest can increase the risk of getting blood clots in the legs and lungs. The risk goes up if a woman has:

- A past history of blood clots.
- Varicose veins.
- Past abdominal surgery.
- Obesity.
- A history of smoking.
- A past problem that has paralyzed a part of the lower body.

Blood-thinning medicines can be used to help prevent clots from forming. These are usually given as small shots. The most common ones used are:

- Unfractionated heparin given just under the skin.
- Low molecular weight heparin injected into fatty tissue under the skin.

Blood-thinning medicines might not be used if there are problems with your blood count or there is active bleeding.

Other actions can be taken to help prevent clots from forming during bed rest. They include:

- Leg elevation.
- Exercising and massaging your legs while in bed.
- Wraps placed around the legs that apply intermittent pressure to stimulate blood circulation.

## HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- After childbirth, it is important to get rest and sleep to get your strength back. It also helps you recover from the medicines and anesthesia you may have received during your labor and delivery.
- Walk and move around as soon as you are able. This is good for the circulation in your legs and can lower the chance of blood clots forming in your legs or lungs. The first time you get out of bed, you should have someone help you. You may become dizzy or faint. For the same reason, you should have someone present when you take your first shower.
- When you go home from the hospital, return to your normal and usual activities. This includes exercising, walks with your new baby and a nutritious diet.
- Have someone available to help you get adjusted and take care of the baby while you rest. The best time to rest and get some sleep, especially if you are alone, is when the baby is sleeping. Rest is especially important for breastfeeding mothers because you will be getting up in the middle of the night to care for your new baby.
- You should discuss any concerns or questions you may have about rest, sleep and exercise with your caregiver.

## SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have unusual bruising or any bleeding problems (passing blood clots or bleeding like a menstrual period).
- You develop gradual swelling and/or pain in one or both legs.
- You develop abnormal vaginal discharge.

- If you had a Cesarean section or an episiotomy and develop redness, swelling, draining of pus or opening of the incision.
- You develop a fever above 100.5° F (38.1° C), or as your caregiver suggests.

**SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:**

- You develop chest pain.
- You develop severe shortness of breath.
- You begin to cough up blood.
- You feel dizzy or faint.
- You develop sudden swelling and/or pain in one or both legs.
- An unexplained oral temperature above 102.0° F (38.9° C) develops.

Document Released: 11/30/2009
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.