Description

Postnatal Wellbeing – Why it Matters?

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Introduction

Postnatal care has been regarded as the Cinderella service within maternity care,[1] with the COVID-19 pandemic exasperating existing problems. However, evidence suggests postnatal wellbeing is pivotal to enhancing overall health and transition to parenthood and should not be overlooked.[2] While services continue to be stretched, midwives need to be innovative and effective in signposting families to strategies which can promote health and wellbeing.

Enhancing wellness during the postnatal period is requisite of midwifery care.[3] It can be helpful to centre this within the wider remit of health and wellbeing for the whole family. Encouraging empowerment and autonomy in parenting has been shown to increase positivity whilst strengthening adaptation to parenthood.[2] While all families will have unique needs; community support can be vital. Midwives, working in partnership with local organisations, can suggest group attendance for families to find solace with other new parents.

The NICE guidelines on postnatal care[4] have an in-depth guide to the immediate health checks required for mothers and babies. However other principles of wellness such as the NHS 5 Steps to wellbeing[5] are a useful guide.

For all women, regardless of parity, birth outcomes and community setting, fundamental health principles will promote wellbeing now and in the future.

Diet

Promoting a healthy diet which is rich in Omega 3 and iron is likely to help both baby's development and enhance maternal postnatal recovery.[4] Where this isn't possible within diet, supplements can be taken. Midwives can support families by encouraging a healthy diet for the family, in line with their individual needs.

Sleep

Adequate sleep in the postnatal period is vital. Signposting parents to the excellent resources developed by UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative[5] can provide reassurance to parents whilst facilitating breastfeeding at night. Families must be

aware that new mothers being unable to sleep, particularly when there is an opportunity, could be sign of a developing mental-health disorder and additional support should be explored.[4]

Mental health

Transition to parenthood can be challenging and may be affected by a plethora of pre-existing conditions and circumstances, including those associated with the birth. Acknowledging the transformation within a family is part of the process but parents need to be supported to recognise signs and symptoms of postnatal depression, anxiety and PTSD alongside signposting the range of supportive services that will be available locally.[4]

Fitness and exercise

Supporting women to continue or start simple exercise can help postnatal recovery. Engagement in pelvic floor exercises and neck and back stretches can support healthy recovery from surgery, perineal repair and breastfeeding. Evidence suggests walking outdoors can improve mental wellbeing and enhance health.

Conclusion

Encouraging healthy behaviours into care provides the opportunity to support long-term wellbeing for the whole family. Ensuring the pillars of health and wellbeing are addressed through diet, exercise, sleep and mental health can be a useful framework for midwives and families when promoting health in the postnatal period. **TPM**

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References

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