Description

Nurturing Your Skin

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Our skin is important. I learnt this as a young child, when falling over, it keeps the blood inside! I also learnt this as a nurse, when caring for those bedridden, that extensive pressure on the skin in one position can lead to breakdown and eventually necrosis. As a midwife I learnt the importance of the skin for life when a baby born with a rare genetic condition, epidermolysis bullosa, can cause the skin to be fragile and blister easily. I also have learned as a mother with caring for children with severe eczema and now, as I face an autoimmune long-term skin condition. The importance of caring for my skin has become more acute.

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There is not enough room to cover the anatomy and physiology of the skin as an organ in its own right. It is important to link the purpose and functions of the seven layers to the care provided for women and their babies. For example, consider the skin needs of an older population of women and what should be considered in the healing process after surgery. Suffice here is a reminder that skin has a role in protection from infection, preventing loss of water, insulation and temperature regulation, vitamin D synthesis and for sensation. Your skin colour also has a place in identity and social status. Different skin types will react differently to environmental conditions. Consider these purposes for you as a midwife and how you ensure you nurture yourself and your skin.

Know your skin

Take a good look at the skin of your body all over from time to time. Seeing yourself naked can be tough for some people, but it is good to be aware what is the normal for your skin so that you can recognise when there are significant changes taking place, such as infection, bruising or changes in mole size. Deal with any infections or skin changes quickly, to prevent further damage. Be aware that health conditions such as anaemia and thyroid conditions may impact on the dryness of your skin (Baston, Hall 2107).

Think about what you ingest

Our skin is strongly impacted by the food and drink we have. The British Dietetic Association provides helpful guidance and to be aware of what goes in to our bodies (https://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/SkinHealth.pdf). A balanced diet to ensure the correct vitamins is essential, along with enough water and careful on the alcohol consumption. Smoking is also not helpful. Think about how you can nurture yourself and others better during long shifts and in the hot, dry

atmospheres of maternity units. Can you share nutritious snacks and keep each other hydrated?

Think about what you put on your skin

Consider carefully what products you use, for example, that for shower and hair which will pass over your skin. Many expensive brands include chemicals or perfumes that are not necessary for a healthy skin. Natural products are often just as effective, if not more so as there are less chances of allergy developing. Moisturising your skin, especially in dry areas with central heating, is essential.

Avoiding too much make up, particularly at work, may be beneficial as it can increase dryness and prevent the pores from working effectively. In addition, prevention of sun damage is essential, but also aim to have some short times in the sun uncovered to support vitamin D development.

Think about hand washing

On a daily basis, at work or home, your hands will require washing and drying many times. You will attend regular education about hand washing policies and it is important to take note of the information in order to provide the safest care for mothers and babies. However, it is also important to care for you in this process. If you have a known skin condition ensure you discuss your needs with the occupational health team regarding skin creams and moisturising. Consider the gloves you are asked to wear and question if these are right for you, or if you need to wear them. A balance should be made with the need for protection and the waste of plastic in our maternity environments. Ensure too that you cover any cuts and abrasions to prevent developing an infection (Baston, Hall 2017).

Think about the skin on your feet

Midwives are on our feet a great deal and the skin on them are also important. Ensure your shoes are comfortable and supportive and help your skin to breathe. Nurture your feet when off work by moisturising and having foot baths. A foot massage may also help!

Spend time relaxing and nurturing your inner self

It is known that stress can have an effect on wellbeing and can impact your skin (e.g. Hunter et al 2015) therefore take time to look after you and let go of your day. A massage may help. Caroline Flint, in her wonderful book “Sensitive Midwifery” (1986) provides instructions on how to give yourself a massage and to look after your skin. Finally, ensure you rest and sleep well to enable your skin and body to revitalise. It’s worth it. The aim of this article is to remind us all to care for ourselves, and particularly our skin. As Caroline Flint quotes:

> You need to love and respect your body in order to cherish other women’s bodies during childbirth (1986: 13)

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1. Nurture
2. Nurture You
3. TPM Articles

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1. self-care

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