

Confinement After Childbirth



The Chinese custom of “Confinement After Childbirth”

In China women are confined to their homes for one to three months after childbirth. These first few months after birth are characterized with traditional habits, such as:

- Don't get off the bed
- Don't eat fruit and only a little vegetables
- Don't wash or comb your hair, don't wash your feet, nor brush your teeth
- Eat mainly porridge
- Don't eat pork, you may eat mutton
- Don't add salt or add only a little to your food
- Avoid visitors
- Eat plenty of eggs (5-8/day or more)
- Don't go outside
- Regardless of the weather, wear warm clothes
- Don't open the windows

Even though there are some good aspects to these traditional habits, some of them may adversely affect the health of both mother and child. Below we discuss the traditional Chinese custom of “Confinement After Birth”.

1. Don't Get off the Bed

Adequate rest and sleep are vital for the new mother. However, a new mother who doesn't get off her bed to walk around and get some exercise is more prone to circulatory problems such as varicose veins, oedema and thrombosis. It will also take longer for the uterus to return to its normal size, increasing the risk of uterine infection and heavy bleeding. Early mobilization and daily increasing the amount of exercise are therefore important.

2. Nutrition

Not only adequate rest and sleep, but also a healthy, well balanced diet is important to assure good recovery after the birth of the baby and enough energy to help you cope with the changes of life. A complete and healthy diet consists of:

- ✓ Half of what you eat is fruit and vegetables
- ✓ The other half of your diet consists of grains and protein
- ✓ Drink three cups of “dairy” per day. If you can't have dairy, then you may need to take a calcium supplement. See our handout “Do I Need to Take Calcium, Vit D, Folic Acid and Iron Supplements?”
- ✓ Don't eat more than 1-2 eggs per day

Fruits and vegetables provide vitamins and minerals, which will boost your resistance and can help prevent anaemia. It also contains fibres, which help with digestion and prevent constipation. Women can be anaemic and become constipated after birth. It is therefore ever so important for you to make sure you eat plenty of fruit and vegetables. Make sure you eat at least two pieces of fruit and more than half a pound of vegetables



per day. Dark green vegetables, such as spinach and broccoli contain plenty of iron, which can help to prevent anaemia.

You can add some salt to your food. If you don't add any salt at all, the food will lack flavour, which might influence your appetite.

Eggs contain cholesterol. Eating too many eggs might affect your kidney function. It is therefore important that you limit the amount of eggs you eat and that you also eat other protein foods such as lean meat, fish, seafood, beans and peas.

You can use some oil to prepare your food. Oil will give you energy. Apart from porridge do eat some other grain products, such as rice, noodles and oats.

Read more in our handout "Nutrition for Nursing Mothers" to make sure you eat a well balanced diet.

3. Hygiene

Maintaining good hygiene is important to prevent infection. It will also make you feel more comfortable. Follow the advice below:

- Wash the vulval area daily, keeping it clean and dry
- Change your pads often (every 2-3 hours)
- Wear appropriate clothing for the weather, making sure you are warm and comfortable in the winter and comfortably cool in the summer
- At least wash your face and feet daily and brush your teeth every day
- Keep the indoor air fresh and circulating

Some symptoms of postpartum infection are:

- Temperature $>37.5^{\circ}\text{C}$, rapid pulse
- Tenderness of the uterus on palpation
- Offensive lochia
- Perineal wound is swollen, red, inflamed, painful

See your doctor if you have 1 or more of the above symptoms. See also our handout "When to Call for Help".

4. Neonatal jaundice

Neonatal jaundice can be divided into physiological and pathological jaundice.

Physiological jaundice starts 2-3 days after birth, peaks at 4-6 days and then disappears after 7-10 days. If a baby is completely breastfed, he might have breast milk jaundice, which could start 4-7 days after birth with its peak at 7-10 days. It might take 3-6 weeks for breast milk jaundice to disappear. This is quite normal as long as your baby is otherwise healthy: he is alert, he drinks well (8-12 times a day during the first 2-3 weeks), his weight is within the normal limits (he doesn't lose more than 7% of his birth weight, he starts gaining weight from the fifth day after birth, and he regains his birth weight by two weeks).

In order to prevent jaundice from getting worse:

- Start breastfeeding early (within one hour of birth) and then continue to feed the



baby regularly (8-12 times per day in the first 2-3 weeks)

- Open the curtains and expose the baby to sunlight, making sure you don't dress him too warmly. Sunlight will reduce jaundice.

Call a doctor in the following situations as they might indicate pathological jaundice:

- Your baby develops jaundice in the first 24 hours after birth
- the jaundice isn't gone within 2-3 weeks (jaundice might take 3-6 week to disappear in an otherwise healthy breastfed baby)
- the jaundice continues to get worse
- the jaundice returns after it disappeared
- the jaundice started after one or several weeks post partum
- your baby looks very yellow and he is sleepy and not feeding well

5. Preventing Rickets

Rickets affects the growth and development of your baby. It is caused by a lack of calcium and vit D. Vit D is necessary for the absorption of calcium. Some symptoms of rickets are:

Night terrors, irritability, sweating, square skull bones, breastbone sticking out ('pigeon chest'), delay in teeth coming through (after 10 months), bowed legs.

In order to prevent rickets in your baby it is important that you supplement him with vit D. Please ask your doctor or midwife when to start and how much to give. Vit D is also produced in the skin under influence of sunlight. It is therefore important that you bring your baby outside as early as possible. Take him out for at least half an hour per day.

6. Avoid Visitors

Not allowing people to visit and hold the baby can prevent pathogens from infecting the baby. However, if your visitor is healthy and washes his hands before handling the baby, then there is no reason to worry.

We wish you a happy, healthy and safe postnatal period!

Please be aware that the information provided is intended solely for general educational and informational purposes only. It is neither intended nor implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice. Always seek the advice of your physician for any questions you may have regarding your medical condition. Never disregard professional medical advice or delay in seeking it because of something you have received in this program.

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