

Surgery and the Breastfeeding Mother



You may find you need surgery while breastfeeding your baby. It is certainly not necessary to wean. And the effects of anesthesia are very short lived. Plan to resume breastfeeding as soon as possible.

Planning for Surgery

- Pump and freeze a supply of breast milk in advance.
- Use out-patient surgery that will not require an overnight stay, if feasible.
- Assure that the baby will accept a bottle or practice using a cup for feedings (see our handout “Overcoming Bottle Rejection”). Avoid bottles for infants less than 4-6 weeks old if there has been any reluctance for the baby to breastfeed. Breastfed babies generally are able to more easily go from breast to bottle by using a nipple with a long shank, wide base and slow flow. Teach your care givers to feed your baby with Paced Bottle Feeding (see our handout “Bottle-feeding like Breastfeeding”).
- Discuss the type of pre-anesthesia medication and anesthesia that will be used with your surgeon. If there is concern about the anesthesia used, check Toxnet <http://toxnet.nlm.nih.gov/cgi-bin/sis/htmlgen?LACT> for information.
- Arrange to nurse the baby right before surgery.
- Make rooming-in arrangements for the baby. Often hospitals require another adult to be present to care for the baby.
- Arrange for a hospital grade electric breast pump for use in the hospital for occasions when the baby is not present or nursing. If a hospital grade pump is not available, then a bilateral electric personal use pump would be your second choice.

Day of Surgery

- Breastfeed, with help, as soon as awake from the anesthesia.
- If the surgery is on the breast, the infant can nurse if his mouth does not cover the incision area. If so, dress the incision (it may ooze breast milk and need frequent changing) and use a breast pump until sufficient healing has taken place. Continue to nurse on the other breast.
- Use post-operative pain medications as needed. The amount of medication passed to the infant is minimal and will be insignificant to the healthy baby who is gaining well.
- If other medications are necessary, assure that they are compatible with breastfeeding. Most are. Check Toxnet.
- Plan for help at home for several weeks to allow ample time for recuperation.

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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