



Chapter 10

Nursing Care of Women with Complications After Birth



Objectives

- Describe signs and symptoms for each postpartum complication.
- Identify factors that increase a woman's risk for developing each complication.
- Explain nursing measures that reduce a woman's risk for developing specific postpartum complications.



Objectives (*cont.*)

- Describe the medical and nursing management of postpartum complications.
- Explain general and specific nursing care for each complication.
- Compare and contrast mood disorders in the postpartum period.



Categories of Postpartum Complications



Shock

- Defined as a condition in which the cardiovascular system fails to provide essential oxygen and nutrients to the cells
 - Cardiogenic
 - Hypovolemic
 - Anaphylactic
 - Septic



Hemorrhage

- Early—within 24 hours postpartum
- Late—between 24 hours and 6 weeks postpartum
- Major risk is hypovolemic shock
 - Interrupts blood flow to body cells
 - Prevents normal oxygenation, nutrient delivery, and waste removal
- Signs and symptoms
 - Tachycardia
 - Falling systolic blood pressure
 - Pale, cold, and clammy skin
 - Mental status changes
 - Decreased urinary output



Safety Alert

- Because postpartum women often have a slow pulse rate, suspect hypovolemic shock or infection if the pulse rate is greater than 100 beats/min



Nursing Care

- Frequent vital signs
- Monitor oxygen saturation levels
- Assessment of lochia
 - Observation for perineal hematoma
- Assessment of fundus
 - Firm with bleeding may indicate vaginal laceration
- Accurate measurement of intake and output
 - Monitoring intravenous fluid therapies
- Monitor for signs of anemia
- Provide emotional support to the woman



Early Postpartum Hemorrhage

- Causes
 - Uterine atony
 - Lacerations or tears of the reproductive tract
 - Hematomas in the reproductive tract



Late Postpartum Hemorrhage

- Causes
 - Retention of placental fragments
 - Subinvolution
- Nursing care
 - Teach the woman to report persistent bright red bleeding
 - Return of red bleeding after it has changed to pink or white
- Prepare for intravenous medication
- Prepare for possible surgical intervention



Thromboembolic Disorders

- A venous thrombosis is a blood clot within a vein
- Causes or risks
 - Venous stasis during pregnancy
 - Pressure behind knees if legs are in stirrups
 - Fibrinogen levels increase during pregnancy, whereas clot-dissolving factors in the blood are normally decreased during pregnancy
 - Varicose veins
- Types of thromboembolic disorders
 - Superficial vein thrombosis (SVT)
 - Deep vein thrombosis (DVT)
 - Pulmonary embolism (PE)



Nursing Care to Prevent a Thromboembolism

- Watch for signs or symptoms of PE
 - Dyspnea
 - Coughing
 - Chest pain
- Teach woman not to cross legs, as it impedes blood flow
- Avoid pressure in the popliteal space behind the knee
- Early ambulation and range of motion exercises
- If antiembolic stockings are prescribed, the nurse should teach the woman the correct method of putting on the stockings



Anticoagulant Therapy

- Teach the woman taking this type of medication
 - Danger signs
 - Prolonged bleeding from minor injuries
 - Nosebleeds
 - Unexplained bruising
 - Use a soft-bristled toothbrush
- Stress the importance of completing follow-up blood tests
- Help the woman cope with this form of medical therapy



Puerperal Infection

- An infection or septicemia after childbirth, with a fever of 38° C (100.4° F) after the first postpartum day
- Risks
 - Cracks in the nipples of the breasts
 - Surgical incision
 - Tissue trauma during labor
 - Open wound at the placental insertion site
 - Retained placenta or blood clots
 - Increased pH of the vagina after birth
 - Endometritis (inflammation of the lining of the uterus)



The Dangers of Puerperal Infection

- A localized infection of the perineum, vagina, or cervix can ascend the reproductive tract and spread to the uterus, fallopian tubes, and peritoneum, causing peritonitis, a life-threatening condition



Safety Alert

- Proper hand hygiene is the primary method to avoid the spread of infectious organisms
- Gloves should be worn when in contact with any blood, body fluids, or any other potentially infectious materials



Nursing Care

- The objective is to prevent the infection from occurring
 - Use and teach hygienic measures
 - Promote adequate rest and nutrition for healing
 - Teach and observe for signs of infection
 - Teach the woman how to correctly apply perineal pads (front to back)
 - Teach the woman to take all antimicrobial medications as prescribed



Mastitis

- An infection of the breast
- Signs and symptoms
 - Redness and heat in the breast
 - Tenderness
 - Edema and heaviness of the breast
 - Purulent drainage may or may not be present
 - Fever, chills, and other systemic signs of infection
 - An abscess may form



Treatment of Mastitis

- Prescribed antibiotics, mild analgesics
- Continue to breastfeed with unaffected breast
- Pump and discard the milk from affected breast (weaning can lead to engorgement and stasis of milk, which can worsen the infection)
- Heat promotes blood flow to the area
- Massage the area of inflammation to improve milk flow and reduce stasis
- Encourage fluid intake
- Wear a supportive bra
- Provide emotional support to the woman



Subinvolution of the Uterus

- The slower-than-expected or failure of the uterus to return to its normal prepregnant condition
- Normally the uterus descends at the rate of 1 cm per day
- Signs and symptoms
 - Fundal height greater than expected
 - Persistence of lochia rubra
 - Pelvic pain and heaviness
 - Fatigue



Nursing Care of the Woman with Subinvolution

- Teach the normal changes to expect
- Report abnormal pattern
 - Fever, pain, persistent red lochia
 - Foul-smelling vaginal discharge
- Comfort measures
- Prepare for possible surgical intervention
- Explain medications prescribed



Disorders of Mood



What Is a Mood Disorder?

- Pervasive and sustained emotion that can color one's view of life



Postpartum Blues (“Baby Blues”)

- Common after birth
- Has periods where she feels let down
- Finds pleasure in her new role
- Usually self-limiting as woman adjusts to her new role



Postpartum Depression or Psychosis

- Serious impairment of one's perception of reality
- More serious than postpartum blues
- Usually manifests within 4 weeks after delivery
- May interfere with mother's ability to respond to her infant's cues
- Maternal-infant bonding may also be affected



Postpartum Depression

- Risk factors
 - Inadequate social support
 - Poor relationship with partner
 - Life and childcare stress
 - Low self-esteem
 - Unplanned pregnancy



Signs and Symptoms of Postpartum Depression

- Lack of enjoyment in life
- Lack of interest in others
- Intense feeling of inadequacy
- Inability to cope
- Loss of mental concentration
- Disturbed sleep
- Constant fatigue and feeling of ill health



Nursing Care

- Refer to a multidisciplinary team
- Be a sympathetic listener for the woman
- Elicit feelings
- Observe for complaints of sleeplessness or chronic fatigue
- Provide support
- Help woman identify her support system
- Determine if the mother is getting enough exercise, sleep, and nutrition
- Help the woman identify ways to meet her own needs
- Refer to support groups



Postpartum Psychosis

- Bipolar disorders
 - Characterized by episodes of mania
- Major depression
 - Deep feelings of worthlessness, guilt, and sleep and appetite disturbances
 - Delusions
- Can be fatal for both mother and infant due to use of poor judgment
- Possibility of suicide or infanticide
- Referral for counseling is essential
- Virtually all antipsychotic medications pass through the breast milk; therefore, breastfeeding is contraindicated



Homeless Mother and Newborn

- Lack of permanent home
- Often have difficulty accessing care
- Follow-up is difficult
- Prior to discharge, ensure mother has a place to go and a way of accessing help
- Facilitate referrals to outreach programs, support services within the community



Question for Review

- What are the key signs of a bleeding laceration in the postpartum period?



Review

- Objectives
- Key Terms
- Key Points
- Online Resources
- Critical Thinking Question
- Review Questions