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>> BODY TALK

Before and After

Books, websites, mothers and relatives. All of them put together have a way of complicating the simplest things in life. If you're a new or an expecting mother, you need to filter out information. Here's what you should do and avoid during and after the pregnancy.

● By PURVI MALHOTRA

During Pregnancy

Do's and don'ts to keep in mind during those nine months. Here's how to keep your baby and your body safe and healthy.

What to do

Morning Sickness It might be labelled 'morning', but pregnancy queasiness can hit anytime, anywhere. Your stomach might flip-flop from the most normal smells like brewing coffee or some foods at the cafeteria. Stock up your drawers with crackers and other bland foods that can be lifesavers when you feel nauseated. Drink plenty of fluids. Ginger ale or tea can help too. Plus, add red meats, poultry, leafy green vegetables, whole-grain cereals, pastas, beans, nuts and seeds to your diet.

Exercise It's essential but do so at a moderate pace. Walking is great in the first two trimesters as it helps the body withstand the rigours of labour and makes delivery easier. Exercises like weights, swimming and running should be avoided.

Early to bed Aim for a thorough seven to nine hours of sleep. Rest on your left side as it improves the blood flow and prevents swelling. During the day, move around every few hours as it eases muscle tension and prevents fluid build-up. Practice relaxation techniques, such as breathing slowly or try prenatal yoga.

Safety first Make sure your health problems are treated and kept under control. If you have diabetes or high blood pressure, control and monitor your

blood sugar and pressure levels closely. Consult the doctor before stopping or starting any medicines.

What not to do

Food to avoid Be cautious of the food you consume during these nine months. Listeria, which is caused by uncooked meats, some seafood, unpasteurised milk and soft cheeses can cause birth defects, miscarriages and stillbirth. Although some seafoods are a great source of protein, iron and Omega-3 fatty acids, a British study suggests that they can actually contribute to poor verbal skills, behavioural disorders and other developmental issues. Some fish and shellfish contain harmful levels of mercury. As for dairy products such as skimmed milk, mozzarella and cottage cheese that can be healthy, anything containing unpasteurised milk is an absolute no no. These products can lead to food-borne illnesses.

Caffeine No matter how much you crave for that early morning cup of coffee, cross it from your schedule while the pregnancy lasts. According to some studies, caffeine ups the chances of miscarriage and low birth weight. Caffeine in excess, which is over 300 milligrams per day, is anyway considered bad, regardless of pregnancy.

Alcohol and drugs There's no prescribed level that's safe when it comes to alcohol consumption. Its detrimental effects range from miscarriage, stillbirths, fetal alcohol syndrome that causes facial deformities, heart problems, low birth weight to mental retardation. Even moderate consumption can impact the child's brain development. Drugs on the other

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hand affect the developing embryo and the mother. Drugs like cocaine hinder the oxygen and nourishment of the child leading to birth defects or even an addiction in the unborn child.

Infections Avoid exposure to toxic substances and chemicals, such as cleaning solvents, lead, mercury, insecticides and pesticides, and paint. Don't use scented hygiene products either, as they might cause infection. Scented sprays, sanitary napkins, and bubble baths might increase the risk of urinary tract or yeast infection.

Smoking It's harmful otherwise, and during pregnancy, it's definitely off limits. And so is the case with passive smoking. Both have been linked to a low birth weight, miscarriages and premature births.

What to do after the baby

There will be enough advise on how to take care of your baby. But here's how you care for yourself:

Postpartum blues Changes are inevitable, especially during the first six to eight weeks post delivery. Expectations from yourself and family take a leap. These mental and physical transformations can cause depression that need to be corrected. Take rest, make some me-time and share your feelings with someone close to you.

Sanitation Some bleeding post delivery is normal. It will be bright red at first, which will turn pinkish after a few days followed by white discharge for two to six weeks. Do not at any cost use tampons; go with the safer sanitary pads.

Sexual intercourse Give your body some time. The duration might differ from case to case, but it's recommended you visit your gynaecologist for your post-partum check up before having sex.

Caring for your breasts

Whether you breastfeed or bottle-feed, it's important to take care of your breasts post birth. Some nursing mothers' breasts tend to get hard and swollen. Don't worry, the swelling usually subsides after a day or two.



Tell Tales

These are traditions handed down generations. But do they help?

- 1 **Keep your head covered for seven to 10 days.** Your mother-in-law will badger you into covering your head with a warm scarf or shawl to protect it from the cold and wind. Air conditioners might be banned all together as it could lead to muscular and joint aches and pains. However, if you have had a summer baby then all the best.
- 2 **No cold drinks, only water boiled with cumin** Anything and everything cold is going to be a big no, especially aerated drinks and packed juices. You'll be politely, yet firmly advised to make do with water boiled with cumin as it is said to help clear up the stomach. Doctors today have a different take on it.
- 3 **Tie your stomach with a belt or a cloth** Many people believe that if you keep your stomach tied with a belt or any cloth then your stomach will not sag and you won't end up with a big belly. Try your luck.
- 4 **Don't keep your hands in water for too long** Or don't take a bath for the first two to three days at least. If you do, it is believed that you will land up with lifelong aches and pains. Hey, but what about hygiene?

After pains After birth, pain in the lower abdomen is common in case of your second delivery or during the lactation period. These pains are actually a sign of your uterus returning to normal. Usually the pains stop a few days after the birth of your baby.

Birth control Did you know that you can get pregnant just two weeks after giving birth? For your health and the health of your next baby, turn to birth control pills. Space your pregnancy. Progesterone Only Pills (POP) or other forms of contraception do not affect the quality or quantity of your breast milk.

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