Chapter 10

Nursing Care of Women with Complications After Birth

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?