

## **The “Gotta Haves” Before Delivery.....by Denise Altman, RN, IBCLC, LCCE**

As a childbirth educator, nurse, and a generally organized person, I felt prepared for anything with the birth of my first child. For the first couple of weeks when I wasn't allowed to drive, I soon found out that I had been a little too smug. My husband ended up making several trips to the store for items that I had either forgotten, or miscalculated the amounts needed.

I discovered later that I wasn't alone. Many new mothers told me that there were several things that they were unaware that they needed or would use at a rapid rate. There were also many things, clothing mainly, that they over-bought. Many stores provide a list of layette items, but there seems to be a lot of unnecessary things; and they are baby focused only. I decided to make my own list of “gotta haves” for families during the first month postpartum.

### **FOR MOTHER**

#### **Medicines**

There are several over the counter medicines recommended for use after delivery; ask your doctor about this ahead time. It is much easier to have these in advance rather than waiting until you are discharged from the hospital (when you really won't feel like stopping at the drugstore). Some doctors will even give you your prescriptions for the stronger pain medicines ahead of time for you to have filled.

Stool Softener- This can help ease some of the soreness for the first bowel movement with stitches, something many women are afraid to experience.

Tylenol, Advil, Ibuprofen- Mostly used for mild pain associated with episiotomy, uterine cramping, or breast engorgement.

Mylicon/Anti-flatulent- This assists with expelling gas associated with cesarean delivery.

Prenatal Vitamins/ Iron-Many doctors recommend that you continue your vitamins after delivery to help you heal faster.

#### **Personal Items**

Be sure to stock up on things like toothpaste, shampoo, deodorant, and other personal items for both mom and dad. These are things that you tend to forget about afterward; until you run out! Also be sure that you have plenty of soap and toilet paper. You will be using more than usual, especially with visitors.

Sanitary Pads- You will need about four boxes of varying thicknesses. You will need to change your pad very frequently so it's necessary to have a lot on hand. Tampons aren't recommended after having a baby, regardless of the type of delivery.

#### **Household Items**

Be sure that you have plenty of cleaning supplies, at least two of the more frequently used items. You will particularly want dish soap, hand soap, dish detergent, and bleach.

Washing Powder- Baby's laundry is done separately for the first year because their skin can't tolerate harsh detergents. For this reason you should use a mild or hypoallergenic soap; include some of your tops if your baby is hypersensitive. It is also helpful to add a half a cup of white vinegar to the rinse water to ensure that the soap residue is rinsed completely. The one thing that you DON'T want to use on baby clothes is fabric softener. It impairs the flame retardency of sleepwear.

#### **Kitchen Items**

When people ask what you need, tell them to cook! Encourage them to bring over their favorite meal-in-one or their specialty dish after you have the baby. This will help you and dad immensely, and is an easy way for friends and family to help.

Pantry Goods- Stock up ahead of time to avoid spending a lot of money on take-out.

Convenience items are jarred spaghetti sauces, various pasta's, rice, dried beans, “helpers” for hamburger, tuna, or chicken, canned soup, whole grain cereals, instant muffins or bread mixes, juice, and various crackers. It's smart to have extra bottles of condiments you frequently use.

Frozen Foods- It's easy to make and freeze dinner items like casseroles or cooked meats ahead of time for dad or a helper to cook. You can even freeze meats in some marinades for grilling or easy cooking. Some good freezer foods are extra loaves of bread, fruits and vegetables, and a variety of meat and fish.

## **For Breastfeeding**

You need to start considering how you are going to express your breast milk if you are going back to work. Many moms decide to rent for a short while before making a large investment on a pump, and this can be a good idea. Call around to get the best prices for buying while you are still pregnant so you can make an educated decision after delivery, then budget for it now. Take a breastfeeding class to learn more about the best brands and options for you. Do not use a previously owned breastpump-you can't completely sanitize these so they are single user only per the FDA.

Nursing Bras- This is something that you don't want to skimp on but it will be difficult to tell just what your breast size will be when your milk comes in. Go to a reputable maternity store to be fitted for a nursing bra, but only purchase one or two. This will do in the beginning until you have a better idea of size. You will need two sets of washable breast pads as well; these allow air flow and are less of an infection risk than disposable pads.

## **Miscellaneous**

Batteries- You will find that toys eat these things up and all require a different size. Don't forget to have batteries for the camera and charge up the video recorder.

Pet Items- make sure that you have plenty of pet food on hand. Treats are also a good idea, pets get less attention at this time and may need something to make up for it. A bone or new toy or two can divert their attention for a little while.

## **FOR BABY**

First you must decide where baby will sleep. You can get a crib, bassinet or infant carrier and your baby will be comfortable in all. It all boils down to your decision of the best place. You will also need somewhere to keep the baby's clothes; if you get a low dresser you can put a changing pad on top and avoid the table. Shelves are great for extra items and remain useful as your baby grows.

## **Clothing**

You will find that you may get tons of newborn clothes. Don't take the tags off of everything, you will be making some returns. They grow out of this size very quickly and you won't need a lot at first. The easiest to have on hand are gowns (4), Footed pajama's (4), onesies (6), several little simple "play outfits," and socks (8).

Layette- Starting off you will need three crib or bassinet sheets, two liners, and several lap pads to help with nighttime leaks. You about 2-3 of varied weight blankets and materials. Cloth diapers are great for burp cloths and cleaning up, one package will last you quite a while. For bath time you will need two hooded towels and fifteen to twenty washcloths. Why so many? Most pediatricians will tell you not to use anything but plain water on baby's skin for diaper changes in the first month. Their skin is just too sensitive even for the unscented wipes.

## **Personal Care**

Diapers- Keep all disposable diapers that you receive as gifts. You will find that one particular brand seems to fit your baby's body better than others, you can return unopened packs later. In the first month, you will probably use about 160 diapers so have plenty on hand. Also, few babies are in the newborn sizes for long, some never fit them. Make sure that the majority of your diapers are size one-too big is better than too little. If you are using cloth diapers, arrange for a diaper service at least for the first month. You are recovering from giving birth and may not have the energy for laundry. You will need about three dozen cloth diapers and a box of liners.

Diaper Container-Look for a container that seals tightly and uses a liner. If you are using cloth diapers, you will also need pails for rinsing and soaking soiled diapers.

Nail Clippers/ scissors-You can usually buy sets of these and decide which tool you prefer.

Nasal aspirator- You should get one of these from your hospital or birth center, make sure it leaves with you! If you are having a homebirth, your midwife will probably give you one as well.

Soft Hairbrush- Even if your baby is completely bald, this is a valuable tool. Use a soft hairbrush to wash baby's head for loosening dry skin and stimulate circulation to prevent cradle cap.

Soap/Lotion-Even the "sensitive skin" baby products can be too harsh for some of them. To avoid problems, many pediatricians recommend unscented Dove soap and hypoallergenic lotion.

## **Feeding**

If you are going to formula feed, there is a minimum of equipment that you will start off with and probably add to later.

Bottles/Nipples- You will need at least twelve four ounce bottles with nipples in the beginning, you will need the ten ounce bottles when baby's appetite increases. You can start big bottles and just fill the amount needed, which is definitely more cost-effective. Have at least four spare nipples on hand, they wear out rapidly

Cleaning Supplies- All bottles (and pacifiers) must be sterilized for the first four months. You will need a bottlebrush, a box for running small parts in the dishwasher, and a large pot like a Dutch oven or stockpot. You can buy sterilizers, but they can be expensive.

Formula- Find out what your pediatrician recommends and have a couple of cans on hand. However, don't buy too much and save your receipts because many babies are allergic to the commonly used brands.

Measuring Cups- Purchase the largest that you can find, at least a quart size. It is much more accurate to mix your formula in this rather than the bottle which may not be calibrated correctly. Use a long-handled plastic or metal spoon for mixing, it won't hold bacteria like a wooden spoon.

Kettle- You will need to boil water to mix powdered formula. A large tea kettle will allow you to mix several bottles at once.

If you are breastfeeding and going back to work or school, you probably won't introduce a bottle until the baby is about a month old. It may be handy to have 3-4 four ounce bottles on hand in case you express some milk and need to store it. Milk can also be stored in breastmilk bags.

### **Medicines**

Check with your pediatrician to find out what he recommends as far as types or brand names as well as when to use them.

Anti-pyretic- This medicine, commonly infant Tylenol but sometimes Ibuprofen is for fever. Your pediatrician will also give you the correct dosage for your baby.

Diaper ointment- This is very subjective area; everybody had their favorite. Purchase small amounts to maintain freshness. Many of these can also be used for circumcision care.

Alcohol pads- You will need these for cord care until the umbilical stump falls off. Pads are better than the swabs because they cover the area more completely and are less likely to pull a scab.

### **Miscellaneous**

Lights- In the nursery, you will need a small lamp on top of a dresser or shelves as well as a night light for dark rooms and parent visibility.

Cool Mist Humidifier- Humidifiers are a great help with congestion. It is not necessary to spend lots of money on this item. Find one that is easy to clean, they can grow molds rapidly. It's also a good idea to have extra filters on hand as well.

Car Seat- You must have one, it's the law in all fifty states and the fines are hefty. The safest for newborns are infant seats. However, if you can only afford one, make sure that is a convertible car seat. Check Consumer Reports for safety reports and trials. Do not purchase a previously owned seat-it may have been in an accident and may not be safe.

Stroller- Believe it or not, this is something that you will use after the first week or two. The house gets pretty closed in and you may want to go for a walk in the neighborhood. Make sure that you get one with a broad base that seems hard to tip over. You also want one that is fairly easy to fold up and put in the car. Newborns are unable to sit up so a seat that reclines flat is very important.

As I said in the beginning this is only the minimum that you need for about the first month or so. This is also assuming that you have a full-term baby without any special needs or care. Once you get past the first month, it will be a little easier for you to figure out your families needs. You will also be mobile again!