

WoH 380

Care of a new Mother / Freedom from Slavery

Tammy: What was the hardest job you've ever had to do?

Carol: I think becoming a mother was one of the most challenging and most exciting jobs I've ever done.

Tammy: It is amazing, isn't it! Full of lovely times, but often very demanding. Definitely twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

Carol: Motherhood is such a time of change. What an important job we mothers do!

Tammy: Earlier on *Women of Hope* we talked with Doctor Kerryn about looking after our babies. Today, we're going to talk about the mother of a new baby. Welcome to the conversation.

Carol: Welcome back, Doctor Kerryn. Could you tell us again about yourself?

Dr K: Thank you, Carol. I work as a doctor in the community and have had experience in hospitals, caring for pregnant mothers and young children. I also have two little girls less than four and have been challenged by learning how to care for them as a new mother.

Tammy: Thank you for joining us again ... We don't always think of caring for the mother do we? So, how can a new mother care for herself?

Dr K: Often a new mother becomes very focused on her baby...and she is usually caring for a husband, children...and maybe elderly or sick family members. In all this, she needs to care for herself.

Carol: If we don't care for ourselves...and become sick, who will care for our family?

Dr K: Every new mother needs rest. If someone offers to wash your dishes, say thank you and let them do it. Don't worry about your home being perfect if you need to sleep!

Tammy: And if someone offers help to cook meals let them do it.

Carol: If there is help in your community to babysit the older children for short times, then make sure you rest. Don't just rush around doing the cleaning.

Dr K: That's good advice. Medical studies show that women who have a supportive community to help them are most likely to be happiest and healthiest.

Tammy: In some cultures, the new mother is not allowed to leave her bed for the first month.

Dr K: That is a very good idea. The mother can rest and recover from the birth, and spend time learning about her baby.

However, too much lying around can increase the risk of clots forming in the legs. These clots can go up into the lungs and cause terrible problems.

I recommend gentle walking as soon as possible after the birth to prevent this and to strengthen your muscles. But no heavy exercise for at least the first six weeks. After a caesarean section, no lifting!

Carol: I heard a good rule – never lift anything heavier than your baby!

Dr K: Sensible! The other exercise I recommend is pelvic floor exercises. The muscles around the vagina are stretched by childbirth. They are also under pressure during the pregnancy. This can make a woman have difficulty controlling her bladder or bowel. Gradually strengthening these muscles is important to improve this control. If there are problems after the first six weeks, talk to your nurse or your doctor.

Tammy: I can never be sure what muscles to exercise!

Dr K: Try stopping the urine flow when you are on the toilet. This will show you the muscles to tighten. Do this three times a day anywhere – when you're standing preparing a meal...or when you're sitting. Start by holding for about 2 breaths in and out...and do 6 in a row.

Carol: That is a lot of exercises to do – three times a day, six times!

Tammy: And if we do them for life we will keep good control! What about looking after that area after birth?

Dr K: Often women can have nasty grazes or tears during childbirth. Keep any wounds clean. Use clean water and wash twice a day. Ice packs every few hours in the first couple of days help reduce some of the swelling, bruising and pain. The doctor might give you some pain relief medication. Make sure your bowels are working and the motions are soft. If the motions are hard, drink lots of water, and eat some fresh fruit.

Bleeding can last up to six weeks...but if it lasts longer, or you have bad lower belly pain or fever you may have an infection in the womb and need treatment. If there is any bad smell, redness or pain in your wounds you could have an infection that also needs treatment. See your health care worker.

Cramps like a period pain are common, especially when breastfeeding, as it helps the womb to become smaller.

Tammy: Many women wonder when they can become intimate with their husbands again.

Dr K: The answer is when you feel comfortable. Usually, waiting for the first six weeks is sensible. Often, with the hormonal changes, it can be quite dry, so use a lubricant or a vegetable oil. Things can feel quite different after a baby has gone through.

Carol: Today on *Women of Hope* we're talking about how to take care of the mother after she's had a baby. Dr Kerry, are there some special foods you should eat? My Chinese friend was given lots of ginger, chicken cooked in rice wine and rice. Maybe in your country this is the same.

Dr K: Many cultures have lots of rules about what to eat...and often the mother or mother-in-law will look after you and your baby! This is good.

Make sure you have enough food with plenty of fruit and vegetable. Protein, like meat or lentils, helps with healing.

If you are a vegetarian or if you lost a lot of blood during the delivery, ask your health care worker about an iron supplement.

Many women are also low in vitamin D and calcium, which are important for strong bones for you and your baby. Your vitamin D comes mostly from the sunlight. Ten minutes of sunlight on your face and arms every day should be enough. For calcium, you need three serves of calcium rich food, like dairy, eggs or bony fish...or a calcium supplement.

Carol: Hmm, enough food, fruit, vegetables, protein, iron, vitamin D and calcium. Those things will help make you feel better, too!

Tammy: Some women feel moody or down after having a baby. Why?

Dr K: There are big changes in hormones. This is often called “the baby blues”, and can make you cry over tiny things. If this doesn’t improve quickly or if you notice a new mum acting strangely, please get help.

Many women can get depressed in the first year after their baby is born. Particularly, if they have little support or there are problems with the baby or their own health.

On rare occasions, a woman can develop both depression and psychosis. This is dangerous and can lead her to try to kill herself or her baby. If you are concerned about someone, make sure they see a doctor and that you try and offer them some help.

Tammy: Sadly, there was a woman in my town who was very depressed. She got up in the middle of the night and hanged herself. Her husband found her body in the lounge room in the morning. She left behind a 4 month old baby boy. And no one knew how she was feeling beforehand.

Carol: What a tragedy for that family! Sisters, talk to each other. Care for each other. If you’re feeling that there is no hope, speak to someone. It is not a weakness.

Dr K: We all feel sad at times, and feel that life is difficult. There are people who care and can help look after you and your baby. And depression can be treated.

Tammy: Most of all, remember that God made you and he loves you, even when you feel like there is no hope and that you have failed.

Carol: Wow! That is so good to know. Let's listen to some music and think about how we can care for the new mothers amongst us and how we can look after ourselves. Thank you for sharing with us, Doctor Kerryn.

Tammy: Before the music we were saying that sometimes new mums feel they have failed, and they feel hopeless. Well, they aren't the only ones who feel like that. Do you ever feel trapped and hopeless? Maybe because of the situation you are in.... maybe because you can't change yourself... Well, Ros is here to share with us a message of hope. Welcome back, Ros.

Ros: Thank you Tammy, and thank *you* for being with us today...I have another story from the Bible for you. We talked recently about Abraham and his descendants...they were called Israelites. They had become slaves in Egypt. You might remember that..?

Tammy: Oh yes! The king, Pharoah, ordered his soldiers to drown the Israelite baby boys; but the Israelite women were strong and clever and managed to save many of them.

Carol: That's right! And one mother made a little waterproof boat and she hid her baby among the reeds at the water's edge. Pharoah's daughter found him and actually adopted him.

Tammy: Yes, and the Israelites were crying out to God for help. You said that God heard and had compassion.

Ros: Well, that baby, Moses, grew up. Would you like to listen to the next part of this story from God's word? (Exodus ch 4-12)

One day God spoke to Moses when he was all alone in the desert. He told him who he was and that he wanted to save his people. God said Moses had to go to the new Pharaoh and tell him 'Let my people go!' Moses was afraid- well, I'm not surprised! and he made lots of excuses. But God gave him many signs, so at last Moses and his brother Aaron went to see Pharaoh in his splendid palace.

Pharaoh just laughed at them- there was no way he was going to let the people go and lose his whole work force! He had no respect for God. Pharaoh worshipped the idols of Egypt. There were different ones who were supposed to look after the land, the river, the crops and animals and the people. In fact, his people worshipped *him* as divine. How proud he was!

Then God began to show *his* power, and to show his people how much he loved them. Through Moses, God threatened Egypt with a series of ten disasters- frogs and flies, hailstones and boils; the cattle got sick and died, the river was not fit to drink and the crops were eaten by a plague of insects.

(Maybe a bit of atmospheric music here?)

Carol: It sounds like the idols of the country could not protect them, and neither could the king.

Ros: That's right. And the Egyptians were scared. When each disaster struck, Pharaoh would say they could go, and then change his mind; or he would say only the men could go. But at last God sent him a final warning: 'The Israelites are like my first-born son. If you do not let them go, I will kill *your* first-born son-

yours, and others all through your land'. And still Pharaoh refused. He hated the Israelites and by now he hated their God too.

So God did it. The Bible says: that night God sent his angel of death across Egypt; but the Israelites were not harmed. Pharaoh was broken. 'Go' he said, 'take your families and your animals, and go and worship your God. And bless me too'. The Israelites had already packed their bags, and they left, thousands of them, with Moses leading the way. The king changed his mind again and tried to stop them, but God opened a path through the sea and they escaped. They were free at last!

Carol: What an exciting story from the Bible! Imagine how terrible it must have been for the slaves... Slavery turns *people* into just *property*. That is so wrong! God made us in *his* likeness, so that means we each have great value and dignity.

Ros: Yes, I agree. But these poor people did the best thing- do you remember?...

Carol: Do you mean... that they called out to God for help?

Ros: Yes! That's always the best thing to do when you're in trouble. And what did the story say about God's response?

Carol: God heard their cry... and he acted. He called Moses to lead them... He showed how useless the idols of Egypt were... and how great he was!

Tammy: Pharaoh really didn't want to let the Israelites go, did he? But in the end he had to give in.

Carol: Did you notice that Pharaoh even had to ask for God's blessing?...

Ros: ... yes, because by then he knew; there was one true and living God! And you know, God still is the same. He hears the cry of those who are oppressed and beaten down. It still makes him angry. If you feel like that, you can call out to God for help...and he *will* hear you and be with you.

Carol: When I read the Bible, it often mentions this event. It's called the *Exodus*, when God freed the slaves and took them to freedom in the land he had promised.

Ros: That's right, Carol. God's messengers often reminded the descendants of these slaves about what he had done, to encourage them to keep trusting God. ...And that they had an agreement with God, to be his people and obey his word. (Deut. 5:6-7, Judges 2:1, Psalm 81:8-10, Ezek. 11:1)

Carol: Well, it reminds me of something else written in the Bible, many, many years later...after Jesus had come. Jesus came to save us from a *different* kind of slavery. You might know this feeling: we can be a kind of slave to the power of wrong thoughts...and habits and actions that can rule our lives. You might feel that you can never break their power.

But listen to this! The Bible says:

'With joy give thanks to the Father (that's Father God)... He rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us safe into the kingdom of his dear son (...that's Jesus), by whom we are set free, ... that is, our sins are forgiven.' (Colossians 1:12-13, GNB)

Ros: I love that! I can picture Jesus throwing open a dark prison and calling out 'Come and follow me to a life of freedom!' I love it that he called me- and you know, he calls you too. Would you like to follow him?

Tammy: I remember when he called me. It was not a voice that spoke to my ears- it was the message of God's love and forgiveness that spoke to my *heart* and made me want to follow Jesus. And that has brought real freedom into my life. *(Tammy, you might want to say your own words here.)*

Carol: Doctor Kerryn told us some important things today about how to care for new mothers. Don't forget them; but don't forget this important message too- God hears when you call out to him for help, and he offers you a life of true freedom as you put your trust in him.

Tammy: It's been great to be with you again. Thanks for coming. Thank you too, Ros and Doctor Kerryn. Goodbye for now...

Carol: ...and God bless you.

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