Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

Carpal tunnel syndrome occurs when the nerves leading to the hand are compressed by a swelling of the tissues in the wrist as a result of repetitive movements or other causes. Symptoms include numbness and tingling in the hand, along with pain from wrist to shoulder.

When a pregnant woman develops carpal tunnel syndrome, it tends to clear up completely after childbirth, though it may remain a problem during the first month or two of lactation. There are also some cases reported of carpal tunnel syndrome during breastfeeding that begin within a month of birth and only completely resolve after weaning (Wand 1990; Wand 1989; Snell 1980). The majority of these women reported relief from their symptoms through treatments such as wearing a splint at night, keeping the hand elevated, and the use of diuretic drugs. Since the mothers had no residual signs or symptoms, continuing to breastfeed while using this type of conservative treatment is appropriate (Yagnik 1987).

Chickenpox

Chickenpox—a common childhood disease that rarely causes complications if a baby catches it after birth—can be fatal in an unborn baby, a very premature baby, or a newborn when contracted in utero (congenital chickenpox).

The incubation period for chickenpox is from 11 to 21 days and it is contagious for about seven days.

Chickenpox is no longer considered contagious when:

- there have been no new eruptions for seventy-two hours, and
- all the lesions have become crusted.

As most women have had chickenpox during childhood, cases of a mother catching chickenpox before birth are relatively rare.

If a pregnant woman has been exposed to chickenpox and is uncertain whether or not she had it as a child, her doctor can order a blood test to determine if she has immunity to the disease.

If the mother contracts chickenpox within five days before giving birth and her baby is not born with the disease, some experts recommend the mother and baby be separated to minimize the chance of infection, which may be severe if the baby contracts it within ten days after birth (Lawrence and Lawrence, pp. 585-88). Other experts recommend keeping mother and baby together. According to the position statement of the Australasian Society for Infectious Diseases, if a mother develops chickenpox within a week of giving birth or within the first week after birth, her baby should be given an injection of Zoster immunoglobulin (ZIG), but “a mother with chickenpox or zoster does not need to be isolated from her own baby.” This organization encourages the mother to breastfeed the newborn infected with or exposed to the chickenpox virus (Heuchan and Isaacs 2001).

If the mother and doctor decide to separate her from her baby, encourage the mother to express her milk as often as she would be feeding her baby (8 to 12 times per 24 hours) and have her milk given to her baby. (See “When Breastfeeding Is Delayed after Birth” in the chapter “Expression and Storage of Human Milk.”) If the mother has chickenpox, the baby will need a varicella-zoster immune globulin (VZIG) injection, if it is available, since those antibodies prevent transmission or lessen the severity of the infection. There...