

Plain Language Glossary of Postpartum Health Terms

Healthy Start Community Health Worker Course



Developed by JSI for the Healthy Start EPIC Center



Antidepressant medication: Medicine used to treat major depressive symptoms and disorders, including postpartum depression.

Breast pump: A device for drawing milk from a woman's breasts by suction, so that the baby can be fed the mother's breastmilk at a later time (such as when the mother is at work).

Breastfeeding: Feeding a baby milk from the mother's breasts. Also known as "nursing" or "lactation".

Contraception/contraceptive: Methods for preventing pregnancy. Also called "birth control". (See *Table 1* on page 8 for definitions of different birth control methods).

Depression/perinatal depression/postpartum depression: A mood disorder which causes persistent feelings of sadness and loss of interest in daily activities and things you used to enjoy. Perinatal depression is experienced by a woman during or after pregnancy, while postpartum depression is experienced following childbirth up to a year after the baby is born.

Developmental milestones: Developmental milestones are things most children can do by a certain age. At each age children reach milestones in the following areas: social and emotional development, communication and language development, cognitive development and motor development.

Diabetes: A disease in which your blood glucose (blood sugar) levels are too high. Glucose comes from the foods you eat. Insulin is a hormone that helps the glucose get into your cells to give them energy. With type 1 diabetes, your body does not make insulin. With type 2 diabetes, the more common type, your body does not use insulin well. Gestational diabetes starts during pregnancy in some women, due to the effect of pregnancy hormones. Women with diabetes may have more difficult pregnancies with a higher risk of complications.

Fallopian Tubes: Tubes located between the ovaries and the uterus where egg and sperm meet and fertilized eggs are then carried to the uterus. (See *uterus, ovaries*).

Family planning: Making decisions and plans about whether and when to have children, and using birth control to help you carry out your plans.

Father involvement/partner involvement: Father involvement both before and after the child is born is very important to the health and development of both mother and child. Having an involved father during pregnancy has been shown to have a positive impact on birth outcomes. Children with involved fathers are more likely to have better physical and emotional health, better social relationships and do better in school.

Head circumference: Measurement of a child's head around the largest area. It is an important part of well-baby care to help check that the brain is developing normally.

Health care provider: A professional who provides preventive, curative or rehabilitative health care services. Can be anyone who provides health care services including physicians, dentists, nurses, social workers, therapists, etc.

Health insurance: Type of insurance coverage (including private insurance and government-funded healthcare such as Medicaid) that pays for health care and medical expenses. Insurance coverage can vary in how much a person pays for it each month, what health services are covered, and other out-of-pocket costs.

High-risk: More likely to develop or have a disease or health problem.

HIV: HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. HIV weakens a person's ability to fight infections and cancer. HIV can be passed to another person through sex or through sharing needles for drug use. Mothers can also pass it to their babies at birth or through breastfeeding, although taking anti-HIV

medication greatly reduces this risk. A person may have HIV without knowing it until they get HIV testing.

Hypertension: High blood pressure

Immunizations: Shots (vaccinations) given to protect people against serious diseases, such as measles, tetanus and flu. There are recommended immunization schedules for babies, children, teens and adults. An important reason for well-woman and well-child visits is to receive recommended immunizations.

Interconception: The time between the end of one pregnancy and the beginning of the next one.

Interconception Care: Similar to preconception care, but provided to women (and men) between pregnancies. (See *preconception care*).

Intervene/intervention: Intervene means getting involved to prevent something from happening, or solve a problem. A medical treatment or preventive measure.

Intimate Partner Violence: Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is physical, sexual or psychological harm caused by a current or former intimate partner or spouse. Also called “domestic violence”.

Lactation: The secretion of milk from the breasts to feed a baby. Also known as “breastfeeding” or “nursing”.

Lactation counselor: A trained person who provides education and support to help a woman to get started with and maintain breastfeeding. Lactation counselors work with pregnant women and mothers in the hospital or clinic, in the home and over the phone.

Low birthweight: Term used to describe a baby born weighing less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces. Babies with low birthweight may be at increased risk for health problems or developmental delays.

Medical home: Having a usual source of medical care, a regular healthcare provider or clinic that a woman and her children go to. A “patient-centered medical home” is a team-based approach to health

care delivery which provides comprehensive and patient-centered medical care to patients, to keep people as healthy as possible.

Medications: Medicines used to treat diseases or relieve pain. Some medications are prescription medications (ordered by a healthcare provider), while others are “over-the-counter”, meaning you can get them at the pharmacy without a prescription.

Mood altering substances: Substances including alcohol, marijuana and other drugs which affect your mind and change the way you think or feel.

Nutrition: Taking in food and using it for growth, energy and repair. Good nutrition, including eating lots of fruits and vegetables and calcium rich foods, drinking enough water and maintaining a healthy weight, is important for a mother’s own health and helps support breastfeeding.

Obesity: Condition of being overweight.

Ovaries: Two small oval-shaped glands that lie to the upper right and left of the uterus. The ovaries produce eggs and hormones. (See *uterus*).

Ovulate: When an egg is released from a woman’s ovaries into the fallopian tubes. Around the time of ovulation, women can get pregnant if they have sex. (See *ovaries, fallopian tubes*).

Pediatrician: A doctor who specializes in the care of babies, children and adolescents up to age 21.

Perinatal: Period of time before and after childbirth, particularly the five months before and one month after birth.

Planned pregnancy: Intended pregnancy

Postpartum: The period of time after childbirth, from birth until about 6 weeks after the baby is born.

Postpartum visit: A postpartum visit with a healthcare provider should occur at 4-6 weeks postpartum (or earlier in cases of complicated pregnancy). The postpartum visit focuses on checking that the mother's body is healing normally after pregnancy, following up on medical and other issues that may have arisen during pregnancy, screening for postpartum depression, providing support for breastfeeding, offering contraception, providing reassurance and answering the mother's questions. (See *contraception, depression*).

Preconception care: Medical care and preventive activities for women and men that focus on the parts of health that have been shown to increase the chance of having a healthy baby. Preconception care aims to improve people's health before pregnancy by promoting good nutrition and exercise, addressing alcohol, tobacco and drug use, and treating chronic diseases.

Pregnancy spacing: The practice of waiting between pregnancies, also known as "birth spacing". It is important for a woman's body to rest between pregnancies to maintain the best health for her and her children. The current recommendation is to wait at least 18 months between pregnancies.

Prenatal vitamins: Vitamin and mineral supplements that are intended to be taken before and during pregnancy to help cover any nutritional gaps in a mother's diet. Women can continue taking prenatal vitamins in the postpartum period, especially if they are breastfeeding.

Prevent/prevention: To stop a disease or injury from happening. Preventive care is given to help keep people well.

Psychotherapy: Treatment of a mental health disorder, such as postpartum depression, by talking with a therapist or counselor about problems and feelings.

Referral: Sending someone (setting up an appointment) to a doctor or other health care provider, or to another service such as substance abuse treatment, mental health services, or social services.

Reproductive Life Plan: A woman's individual and personal plan of whether, when, and how to have children. It includes personal goals and states how to achieve them.

Risk factor: Something that increases the risk or likelihood of developing a disease or health condition.

Screening: Testing to detect those with a high probability of having or developing a disease or condition. Testing to look for early signs of illness, before you have any symptoms. The word "screening" can also refer to asking questions about a person's health status, history, living conditions and behavior to find out about health risks a person may have.

Smoking Cessation: To quit smoking cigarettes.

STD/STI: STI stands for "sexually transmitted infection". STIs are also called STDs which stands for "sexually transmitted disease". STIs/STDs are diseases passed to people through sex. Using a condom helps to prevent STIs/STDs.

Support system: The people in your life who care about you and give you support and help when you need it. Your support system may include family members, friends, your partner or spouse, and others.

Unplanned pregnancy: A pregnancy that is mistimed, unplanned or unwanted at time of conception.

Uterus: A muscular organ shaped like an upside down pear in which the developing fetus grows during a pregnancy. Also called the "womb".

Well-baby visit: Regular visits with a pediatrician to check on the baby's health and development and provide preventive care such as immunizations. Well-baby visits may include a physical exam, measurement of height and weight and head circumference, hearing and vision checks, assessment of developmental milestones, and offer a chance for parents to ask questions. The recommended schedule for well-baby visits is at 2-5 days and 1, 2, 4, and 6 months.

Well-woman visit/well-woman care: A healthcare visit for women to review their overall and reproductive health and receive preventive services such as contraception and immunizations. Well-woman visits are recommended annually and often include breast and pelvic examinations and a pap smear.

Table 1: Contraceptive (Birth Control) Methods Defined

Birth control pills: An oral contraceptive pill taken daily to prevent ovulation and conception.

Diaphragm: A shallow silicone cup inserted into the vagina to prevent pregnancy. It can last for up to 2 years.

Female condoms: A contraceptive device that fits inside a woman's vagina to prevent pregnancy and STIs.

Fertility awareness methods: A set of practices that are used to determine the fertile and infertile phases of a woman's menstrual cycle to avoid or achieve pregnancy.

Injectables: Birth control that is injected (given as a shot) every three months.

Implants: A birth control implant inserted under the skin in the upper arm, and it protects against pregnancy for up to 4 years.

IUDs: IUD stands for **I**ntra**u**terine **D**evice. An IUD is a device that is inserted into the uterus as a form of birth control to prevent conception. Can be plastic or copper and can be a long-term solution.

Male condoms: A thin covering worn on the penis to prevent pregnancy and the spread of STD/STIs.

Patch: A contraceptive patch applied to the skin that releases synthetic hormones to prevent pregnancy

Spermicide: A sperm-killing agent, usually a cream or jelly that is inserted into the vagina before sex to help prevent pregnancy.

Vaginal ring: A small, bendable ring that you insert into your vagina to prevent pregnancy.

Vasectomy: Surgical procedure that involves the cutting and sealing of vas deferens, the tubes that carry sperm from the testicles.