



WHY IS POSTPARTUM CARE IMPORTANT?

NWA'S MISSION

The National WIC Association (NWA) is the nonprofit voice of the 12,000 public health nutrition service provider agencies who serve nearly 6.9 million mothers, babies, and young children. NWA provides education, guidance, and support to WIC staff and drives innovation and advocacy to strengthen WIC as we work toward a nation of healthier families.



THE ROLE OF WIC PROGRAM IN ADDRESSING ADEQUATE POSTPARTUM CARE

Every month, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) serves 1.5 million low-income pregnant and postpartum participants by providing nutritious foods, nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and referrals to health and social services.¹ Not only does WIC improve the dietary intake of pregnant and postpartum participants but pregnant participants receive prenatal care earlier.²

For the past 50 years, WIC has contributed to healthier pregnancies and improved birth outcomes for mothers, babies, and young children up to age five. WIC does this by ensuring that the nutritional requirements of both mothers and infants are adequately met, creating a positive impact on their health.

Given that WIC plays such a monumental role in ensuring the health and well-being of many of the nation's women, infants, and children, it's imperative that WIC staff understand the impact that adequate postpartum care can have on program participants. After all, it's common for postpartum women to come to their WIC

appointment before their first postpartum visit with a health care provider (HCP). Providing support and resources to these women helps ensure they are receiving the necessary follow-up care.

DOCTORS VISITS AFTER BIRTH

Appointments after birth, also known as postnatal visits, are vital in helping ensure women receive adequate postpartum care. It is a critical period for a woman and her infant, helping to set the stage for long-term health and well-being. The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG) recommends 12 weeks of postnatal support after delivery, with the first evaluation taking place within 3 weeks post-delivery, either in-person or by phone. ACOG recommends that the second visit (i.e., comprehensive well-woman visit which includes a full assessment of physical, social, and psychological well-being) be no later than 12 weeks postpartum.³

However, WIC participants often face barriers when attending postnatal visits ranging from not having an OBGYN to transportation issues. As previously stated, this is why participants often visit the WIC clinic before their first postpartum appointment. Therefore, WIC plays a significant role in ensuring the health and well-being of this population.



THE IMPORTANCE OF POSTPARTUM CARE

The reality is that the risk of pregnancy-related complications continues for one year after pregnancy ends with one in three pregnancy-related deaths occurring within the year after pregnancy.[i],[ii],[iii],[iv] Thus, it's important that WIC participants be encouraged and supported in obtaining adequate postpartum care from the physical, mental, and emotional aspects. WIC staff can do this by listening to pregnant and postpartum participants when they express concerns and providing the appropriate referrals. During certification appointments, staff can help support participants by sharing the urgent maternal warning signs handout thereby helping participants recognize when they need to seek more immediate medical attention. Asking about pregnancy status and recognizing maternal warning signs can help save lives.[v]

Physical Impact

The birthing process has major effects on the body and thus, it's important for the participant to visit their HCP to ensure recovery from childbirth. Very often after birth, attention is shifted from a woman to their infant thus increasing the likelihood that medical issues are overlooked.



Emotional/Mental Impact

Along with the physical toll on the body both during and after pregnancy, those who give birth may experience a mental and emotional toll as well. Postpartum depression can have serious implications for the mother and baby. Nationally, about 1 in 8 women experience symptoms of postpartum depression after giving birth. However, this rate can be as high as 1 in 5 women in some states.[1] Therefore, the nutrition assessment process and referral services provided by WIC link participants with, and at risk of, depression to the appropriate support and services.

Baby Blues or Postpartum Blues:

Postpartum blues is a prevalent condition occurring within the initial week after childbirth. In most cases, these symptoms usually go away within 2 weeks. Common symptoms include mood swings, feeling sad, anxious or overwhelmed, crying spells, loss of appetite, and trouble sleeping.[2]

Postpartum Depression:

Postpartum depression lasts longer than baby blues and is more severe, thus requiring treatment by a HCP. Postpartum depression typically begins within the first month after birth. Untreated postpartum depression can affect a woman's ability to parent and can impact the development of the child.[3]

WHY WIC MATTERS

In the United States, too many women experience serious and life-threatening health complications in the days and weeks after birth.[1] Currently, as many as 40% of women do not attend a postnatal visit.[2] And in some rural areas, the WIC clinic might be the only maternal and child health program in the area.

Although WIC staff can feel hesitant when addressing the topic of adequate postpartum care, it's important that staff provide meaningful support and referrals to program participants. While WIC staff are not experts on adequate postpartum care, WIC remains an important program during this critical time in a participant's life.

- ¹ Zvavitch, P., Beckerman-Hsu, J., Huret, N., Perez- Zetune, V., Reischmann, P., Calvin, K., Thorn, B., 2024. WIC Participant and Program Characteristics 2022 Final Report. US Dep. Agric. 5-133.
 - ² How WIC Helps, 2024. . Food Nutr. Serv.
 - ³ Optimizing Postpartum Care, 2018. . Am. Coll. Obstet. Gynecol.
 - ⁴ Health Care Professionals, 2024. . US Cent. Dis. Control Prev.
 - ⁵ Maternal Mortality Prevention, 2024. . US Cent. Dis. Control Prev.
 - ⁶ Other Health Care Professionals, 2024. US Cent. Dis Control Prev. HEAR HER
 - ⁷ Other Health Care Professionals, 2024. US Cent. Dis Control Prev. HEAR HER
 - ⁸ Health Care Professionals, 2024. US Cent. Dis Control Prev.
 - ⁹ Statistics on Postpartum Depression, 2025. PostpartumDepression.org
 - ¹⁰ Lopez-Gonzalez, D.M., Kopparapu, A.K., 2024. Postpartum Care of the New Mother, in: StatPearls. StatPearls Publishing, Treasure Island (FL).
 - ¹² Postpartum Depression, 2023. . Off. Womens Health.
 - ¹³ Your Postpartum Checkups, 2023. . March Dimes.
- Optimizing Postpartum Care, 2018. . Am. Coll. Obstet. Gynecol.

