

## Surgery and the Breastfeeding Mother

Monica awoke during the night with painful stomach cramps during the last month of pregnancy. After the birth of her son, Joshua, she experienced several more night time attacks of epigastric pain. The diagnosis was gall stones; the treatment was surgical removal.

Karen, mother of four month old Jennifer, noticed a persistent non-painful lump in her right breast. The doctor explained she had a cyst that would have to be removed.

Both of these new mothers faced a dilemma: must they wean their breastfeeding baby quickly in order to have the necessary surgery or might it be possible to continue nursing? The answer is YES!, continue breastfeeding.

### ■ Consider these things:

- Pump and freeze a supply of breastmilk in advance.
- Assure that the baby will accept a bottle or practice using a cup for feedings. Avoid bottles for infants less than 4-6 weeks old if there has been any reluctance for the baby to breastfeed. Breastfed babies generally are able to more easily go from breast to bottle by using the Avent or the NUK nipple or other nipple with a long shank, wide base and slow flow.
- Arrange to nurse the baby right before the surgery.
- Consider the type of pre-anesthesia medication used, if any. If there is concern about the anesthesia used, check with <http://toxnet.nlm.nih.gov/cgi-bin/sis/htmlgen?LACT> for information.
- Breastfeed, with help, as soon as awake from the anesthesia.
- If the surgery is on the breast, the infant can nurse if the mouth does not cover the incision area. If so, dress the incision (it may ooze breastmilk and need frequent changing) and use a breast pump until sufficient healing has taken place. Continue to nurse on the other breast.
- Make rooming-in arrangements for the baby. Often hospitals require another adult be present to care for the baby.
- Arrange for a hospital grade electric breast pump for use in the hospital for occasions when the baby is not nursing.
- Use out-patient surgery that will not require an overnight stay, if feasible
- Use post-operative analgesia as needed. The amount of medication passed to the infant is minimal and will be insignificant to the healthy baby who is gaining well.
- If other medications are needed, assure that they are compatible with breastfeeding. Most are.
- Plan for help at home for several weeks to allow ample time for recuperation.

Please be aware that the information provided is intended solely for general educational and informational purposes only. It is neither intended nor implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice. Always seek the advice of your physician for any questions you may have regarding your or your infant's medical condition. Never disregard professional medical advice or delay in seeking it because of something you have received in this information.

