

## Maternal Dietary Intake Following Cesarean Section

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Community based studies have been reported in the past regarding the wrong beliefs and practices during antenatal and postnatal periods among women who belong to the poor socio-economic group(1-4). However, no data is available on the dietary intake of mothers who are hospitalized after cesarean section.

In order to fill the gap in the existing knowledge the present study was undertaken with the following objectives: (i) to assess the maternal dietary intake following cesarean section; and (ii) to study the dietary beliefs following cesarean section.

### Material and Methods

The study was conducted on 60 consecutive mothers who had undergone cesarean section from September 1989 to February 1990 at a teaching hospital attached to a Medical College, New Delhi.

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The aims of the study were briefed to the mothers. A pretested open ended questionnaire was administered to each mother on the 4th day after cesarean section. Mothers were inquired about when they would start taking normal diet, what kind of foods they should eat and why. Similarly, what kind of foods they should avoid and why.

The dietary intake of mothers was assessed by using 24 hour dietary recall method by experienced dieticians.

### Results

The mean age and parity of mothers was 26.4 years and 1.6, respectively. Half of them were primipara, 40% second para and 10% were para three or more.

Thirteen per cent of mothers were post graduates, 38% were graduates, 28% had done only schooling and the rest 21% were uneducated. Only seventeen per cent of the mothers were working and the rest were housewives.

Forty per cent of children were breast fed within 4 hours of birth, 33% within 4-8 hours, 11% within 9-12 hours, 12% after 12 hours and 4% after 1 day.

The mean calorie intake was  $656 \pm 255$  kals (range 208-1520 kals) and mean protein intake was  $24 \pm 10$  g (range 3  $\pm$  45 g). A quarter 26% of mothers had a caloric intake less than 500 kcal, 10% more than 1000 kals and 64% between 500-1000 kals per day. Similarly, 20% of mothers had a protein intake of less than 15 g, 22% more than 30 g and 58% between 15-30 g per day.

Forty per cent of mothers believed that they could resume their normal diet on the 7th day after delivery while 22% believed they could resume it on the 4th day. Half of them held the wrong belief that "light foods"

which are believed to be easily digestible like fruits, soups, milk and green leafy vegetables should be consumed during the post operative period. Nearly, half (55%) of mothers believed that foods rich in fats should be avoided while 20% had knowledge that whole pulses and strongly flavoured food should be avoided.

### Discussion

The mean dietary intake was inadequate for calories and proteins as against the Recommended Dietary Allowance by the ICMR for Indian lactating mothers (2425 kcal and 75g protein).

It may be due to continuation of the traditional belief that after a surgical operation the intestines become weak and are unable to digest "heavy food" and hence only the food considered to be light should be consumed.

The findings of the present study highlight the importance of training both the medical and para-medical hospital staff to advise the

mothers about the correct dietary practices to be followed during antenatal and post natal period.

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