

Postpartum practices among Chinese and Vietnamese women

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Background

- Chinese and Vietnamese patients make up a large proportion of foreign born Americans in Seattle.
- The majority of Asian women observe parts of the “**sitting month**” rituals for 1-3 months postpartum.
- Most of these rituals are harmless and may help women feel connected to their ancestral roots. Some rituals may conflict with Western medical practices while a few may be harmful and care providers need to inform their patients.

The “**sitting month**” rituals have their roots in the oriental medical theories of Yin, Yang, heat and cold. It is believed that postpartum women are Yin deficient and predisposed to attacks by wind and cold. Thus traditionally postpartum women are advised to observe 1-3 months ritual consisting of restrictions in diet, physical activity, hair washing, and prevention of exposures to cold or wind.

These measures are thought to help women regain energy, produce more milk, and prevent ailments of old age such as: poor vision, digestive disorders, uterine prolapse, back pain, headaches, varicose veins, wrinkling of the skin and premature aging. However, the lay understanding of these guidelines and actual practices vary extensively depending on personal desire, influences of families and friends, education level and acculturation to Western customs.

Purpose

To develop a brochure to increase providers' awareness about Asian women's postpartum practices so that excellent care are delivered with sensitivity to patients' values.

Methods

- Discussed with providers at the International Community Health Services (ICHS) in Seattle, regarding postpartum practices among their patients.
- Reviewed research articles on Pubmed.org, Carey Jackson's unpublished surveys, and traditional oriental medical text on obstetrics and gynecology.
- Developed a brochure to increase provider awareness about Asian women's postpartum rituals.

Results/conclusion

Most Chinese and Vietnamese women observe some forms of the “sitting month” rituals. Common restrictions include:

- **Diet:** No sour or cold food and drinks. No fresh fruits or vegetables. All foods must be well cooked and served hot.
- **Physical activities:** Complete bed rest and avoiding exposing to cold air/wind. No walking outside or any exertion that would cause sweating.
- **Bathing:** No exposure to cold water & wetting their hair.
- **Breast feeding:** Avoid breast feeding newborns colostrum. Instead, some supplement newborns with water.
- **Miscellaneous:** No sexual intercourse, excessive reading, sitting, or crying.



Discussion:

Birth is a very important social and cultural transition for an Asian woman. It is also a time to rejuvenate a mother's energy. Most women observe some of the 'sitting month' rituals. Many of these practices are harmless and women wanting to preserve their cultural heritage should be encouraged to do so. Some of these rituals may be unexpected to hospital routines i.e. a need for warm drinking water and not wetting the new mother's hair after birth. Also, certain rituals may be harmful and they should be avoided.



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