

Postpartum Care Guide

Things to expect and things to do postpartum



CONGRATULATIONS MAMA!

Feature Topics in
This Article:

Physical Changes
Red flags-when to seek help
Emotional Health
Self Care
Other Considerations
Nutrition

One of the things I love the most is working with women at all stages of life. However, one of my biggest loves is postpartum care. It is such an exciting, stressful and beautiful period of life. The postpartum period or fourth trimester is also such a neglected period. Dr.s and hospitals kick you out with a new life, a few handouts, some ibuprofen and good luck. This period is so much more than that. It is a time of physical pain, stress, and healing. It is a time of emotional growth, hormonal roller coasters, anxieties, stress, love and limits. It is a time of learning, experimentation and settling into a new existence. Finally, it often isn't, but should be a time of self care. This last point, self care, is why I am here today. From personal experience with the birth of my own daughter, that after she arrived there were definitely things that I wish I had known before. There were things about my body that changed that I didn't expect, emotional changes that I would have liked to have known about and resources that I wish I would have had beforehand. So, I developed this postpartum care guide to help fill in some gaps in care, to provide some resources all in one place, and help partners understand what moms are going through in their healing process and how they can help. So let's get started!



PHYSICAL CHANGES

Vaginal Soreness-Ummm seems like a duh but seriously it doesn't really hit home till you get home and all things are quiet until you realize your crotch is an open wound and it hurts.

The perineum-the area between the vagina and the rectum will have gotten stretched and possibly torn. Yeah that is painful. Another very common occurrence is receiving an episiotomy, which is where the Dr. may have to make a small cut to widen the vagina to make more room. If that must be done then often there will have to be stitches to repair. So now you have been stretched and sewn-ouch!

Vaginal Discharge- Discharge and bleeding are part of the "cleaning" process after baby. In the next days and weeks after baby arrives your body is adjusting. The bleeding and discharge are your body cleaning itself out and getting rid of extra blood and tissue that was nourishing the baby. Initially the blood will be a bright red color and that will last for a few days. The color will change to pink or brown color and eventually transform into a kinda yellowish more creamy discharge and then be gone. Another common thing is passing clots and some of them can be as large as a plum!! That is huge and normal (no one told me that or maybe they did in my postpartum daze).

After Pains- After your baby is born your uterus will begin to reduce in size and return to its pre-pregnancy size, this process is called involution. By the end of labor it will have already reduced to the level of your bellybutton and after only one week it will be the level of your pubic bone. That is crazy to think about. What has taken nine months to stretch will have reduced back to normal size in only one week. After pains were a huge thing for me that no one told be about and I would have loved to know about. No one told me that I could have contractions for a few days after arrival!! They are no joke either, or at least they weren't for me. My reading online after said, "you may have cramps like during your period." Well ladies I am calling bull hockey on that one. Mine were full on contractions, which I would swear on my daughter's head, were worse than labor. (Not to scare you.) This is normal though. The pain is caused by your uterus shrinking down to its normal size. In a matter of a few weeks your uterus will go from about 2.5lb to only a few oz. The cramps for some moms can be worse during breastfeeding because this can trigger the release of oxytocin which helps stimulate the uterus to shrink.

Physical Changes

Changes in Stool and Urination and Hemorrhoids- As if we don't have enough going on downstairs, cuz we just had a baby, things get more interesting when you realize that you still have to pee and poop.

Constipation-Some moms will experience constipation. This is often common if you have or are using pain medications. This can be really challenging if you are struggling with hemorrhoids because straining is definitely not ideal. We will chat about what we can do to help this later on.

Diarrhea and leaking of gas can also be a challenge for some moms- This is due to stretched tissue of the rectum caused by the added pressure of having a baby. Over time it should get better as your muscles and body heal.

Trouble with urination and incontinence are also very common after birth. One common problem is difficult urination because of the fear of it being painful and burning. It may also be due to the strain that was placed on the muscles of the pelvic floor. The other end of the spectrum is not being able to hold your urine or dribbling urine when you sneeze, cough, etc. Again this is related to the pelvic floor muscles and this can be strengthened and rebalanced over time.

Hair and Skin Changes -Hormones, Hormones, Hormones! As your body's hormone levels are figuring itself out your hair and skin can change, heck why not everything else has!

Hair- it is very common for you to experience hair loss and thinning. Most of the hair happens for the first 3-4 months and for most will slow down after that.

Skin changes- Some common conditions that moms may notice are

1. Hormonal acne
2. Melasma which is change in hyperpigmentation- often caused by UV exposure, genetics and elevated estrogen and progesterone levels combine to create a darkening of skin on lighter-toned faces and lighter patches in the darker skinned
3. Facial spider veins after pregnancy- caused by increased blood circulation and hormone levels highlight facial veins in a spider-like effect
4. Dry skin

Sweating- An increase in sweating at night is also a very common occurrence. This is often, once again a response to hormones adjusting.

Breast Changes- Common changes in the breasts are (see section on boobies on pg):

- Increased in size, darkened areola, small bumps around the nipple and hardening of nipples
- Asymmetrical breast size and/or stretch marks
- Achy and tender breasts or engorged breasts
- Blocked milk ducts
- Sore or cracked nipples
- Mastitis

Fatigue- Fatigue may seem like a no brainer in this situation but what I want you to remember is that your body just went through a trauma and trauma requires healing and healing takes energy. So keep in mind that not only do you have an amazing little baby to tend to but you have a healing body to tend to as well. Self care, Self care, self,care.

Prolapse- Prolapse can occur when then pelvic floor muscles have been overstretched and weakened enough that they can no longer hold the organs in their rightful positions. According to the Mayo Clinic uterine prolapse occurs because of, " the weakening of pelvic muscles and supportive tissues.")

Causes of weakened pelvic muscles and tissues include:

- Pregnancy
- Difficult labor and delivery or trauma during childbirth
- Delivery of a large baby
- Being overweight or obese
- Lower estrogen level after menopause
- Chronic constipation or straining with bowel movements
- Chronic cough or bronchitis
- Repeated heavy lifting



Red Flags!

WHEN YOU NEED TO GO BACK TO THE DOCTOR OR GO TO HOSPITAL

Gory details aside there are also some very important things to remember and look out for during your recovery time at home. The United States is the only developed country where the maternal mortality rate has actually increased. I personally think it is due to neglect on our healthcare systems part, unrealistic expectations and lack of access to postpartum care. This is crazy to me! It is also a big part of why I am writing this booklet. So listed below are some very important things to watch for.t

**IMPORTANT THINGS FOR YOU & YOUR PARTNER TO WATCH FOR
IF ANY OF THESE SYMPTOMS HAPPEN CALL YOUR DOCTOR OR GO TO THE
ER RIGHT AWAY!**

1. Fever over 100.4 Fahrenheit or chills
2. Foul smelling discharge, bright red bleeding that last for longer than 3 days after delivery, clots that are larger than a plum, if you have bleeding that you would need more than one pad in an hour.
3. Increased pain in the perineum, swelling or difficulty with stitches
4. Blurry vision
5. Severe headaches or fainting
6. Any trouble with C-section incision, redness, discharge, pain, etc
7. Warmth, swelling, redness with any of your limbs
8. Warm, red or painful areas on breasts
9. Any trouble breathing
10. Any signs of postpartum depression such as: being unable to cope with everyday situations, thoughts of harming yourself or your baby, feeling anxious, panicked or scared most of the day.

These are all warning signs of potentially very dangerous conditions so please make sure you and your support team are all aware of what to watch for. I personally think to always err on the side of caution.



Emotional Health & Postpartum Changes

Our next topic is emotional health and changes. This is a big topic and one that I want to spend some time with. Pregnancy and birth require so much of us physically and mentally and both aspects require attention and both are equally important. I don't want to diminish how valid and important it is to meet your emotional needs during this postpartum period as well. You will be contending with hormones but also a new life, both yours and the one you created. You will be learning who they are, a new schedule, and a new level of intimacy with your partner, wanted and unwanted "help", sleep and no sleep. Each of these things come with their own emotional components so being able to recognize normal ups and downs and those that may require more help will keep you one step ahead.

I think that most of us have heard of the "baby blues" and postpartum depression. There can also be mild depression or what some call postnatal exhaustion and post delivery stress. All of these conditions are very real and very important to acknowledge, validate and get help if needed. It is important to remember that you have just gone through a GIANT change physically and emotionally all at once. Your hormones are adjusting, your body is adjusting and your world is adjusting.

BABY BLUES

Let's talk about baby blues first. The baby blues are a very common part of adjusting to your new life but those blues should only last a couple weeks. It is 100% normal to be emotional after the birth of your little human. You have just been through a huge event. Depending on how smoothly your birth went you may be dealing with trauma on multiple levels and now you have to deal with healing, hormonal changes, again, and learning how to be a new mom!! It's a big deal and being emotional is part of it. So give yourself permission to experience the emotional piece and know that you are completely normal. I mean that with all my heart you are 100% normal and what normal may look like for you will be different than what normal is for your friends.

Common symptoms of the blues are: 1. crying for, what feels like no reason 2. anxiety, worry, mood swings 3. Feeling overwhelmed 4. Changes in eating habits and sleep (let's be honest, how could these not change with a newborn).

I personally think that when dealing with the baby blues and the overwhelm that comes with being new parents setting boundaries for yourself and others is key. Doing this can be a really helpful way to manage the emotional rollercoaster.

Some examples of things that you could do to set boundaries are; if you have a bunch of friends who are just itching to come visit you and baby make a schedule and only allow friends to visit a certain time or amount of time. Its okay to say no you can't visit because you need time to recover. Or if you have a bunch of friends who want to bring food, have your best friend, parent, partner set up a meal train and let them take care of it.

I also believe that figuring out who is going to be your support system before the baby arrives is useful so you don't get rollercoastered by the sister-in-laws who know everything, the aunt who is too loud or the uncle that smokes.

Finally and it's a big one, and one that I didn't take seriously enough myself, was sleeping whenever the baby is sleeping. Do this!! In those first few weeks give yourself permission to do this, leave everything else. It can wait and you need your sleep. A large part of our emotional well being is rest and sleep. Without sleep everything else becomes unmanageable and heightened.

Physically speaking there are also herbal tinctures and supplements that are safe while breastfeeding that can help with balancing hormones and thus can be helpful with managing the blues. Oftentimes these supplements are just herbs that help with the management of stress and calming the nervous system. There is a great company called Wish Garden Herbs that makes some tinctures for hormonal support postpartum. One is called Rebalance and the other is called Baby Blues. You can also have your placenta encapsulated and take this as a supplement which has been shown in some studies to help rebalance the body and help with emotional support.

You can also seek out an acupuncturist who is also an herbalist who can prescribe an herbal formula for supporting your body and emotions at different points of your recovery. There are natural ways to support hormonal balancing that are safe for breastfeeding moms.



POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION

If you have noticed after the baby comes that your baby blues aren't going away or perhaps your symptoms are getting more intense or worse you may be suffering from Postpartum depression. The symptoms of PPD are much aligned with symptoms of general depression but know that symptoms can sometimes include feelings directed toward the baby, or perhaps feeling like you have no feelings toward the baby.

Symptoms to be on the look out for are; no interest in baby, thoughts of harming yourself or baby, loss of interest in things that you used to enjoy, changes in appetite and fatigue, feelings of guilt or worthlessness, withdrawing from friends or family and trouble with sleeping or eating (beyond the new adjustments to being parents of a newborn). If you have any of these symptoms or your partner notices any of these changes in you then GET help!! Don't be afraid to ask for help and then get it. Reach out to your Dr., partner, friends, family and counselors.

There are other conditions that moms can experience outside of baby blues and PPD. Some of these are Postpartum Anxiety, Postpartum Psychosis and Postpartum Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Without going into too much detail about these the moral of the story is if you are feeling so overwhelmed by your emotional state and it is negatively affecting you, or the way you treat or interact with baby GET help. Get support. It is %100 percent ok to admit that you are feeling overwhelmed, stressed, not feeling "right."

DADDY BLUES

One last thing to mention is Postpartum Daddy Blues. This is a real thing and potentially serious. Think about it, Dad's world has just been rocked too. Dad is also having to deal with a new human, perhaps new feelings of responsibility, a partner with a new body (honestly), sexual abstinence for the healing period, and an emotional partner that needs tending too, among other things. So just like with momma's if you are feeling overwhelmed, DAD, lean on your support system too, get help if you feel like you need it. It isn't a sign of weakness.

Studies have also shown that a man's hormones also shift during pregnancy and after birth. Although the exact reasons are unknown as to why this happens, one school of thought is that perhaps the hormone fluctuation is nature's way of making sure that fathers stick around and bond with their baby. During the process, testosterone levels drop; estrogen, prolactin, and cortisol go up. Some men can even show symptoms such as nausea and weight gain. For most dads this is worse during the 3-6 month period after birth. While lack of sleep is probably the biggest culprit, other possible causes include a history of depression, a dad's rocky relationship with his partner, financial problems or stress, and a sick, colicky, or premature baby.

So pay attention to papa too. Validate and acknowledge their feelings as well and if they need help get it!

SETTING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

I touched on setting boundaries in the section on emotional health, but I wanted to hit on it again because I think it is important for your health, your partner's health and babies health. The amount of change that is coming to your world is huge and I think one of the best ways to ease into that is setting up some boundaries. This will allow for bonding with baby, self care for momma and direction for papa or partner on how to be helpful and involved. Boundaries will also help your friends and loved ones understand where they can help and when it may be too much. You may be wondering how will I know what my limits are?

What are boundaries? A definition of limits or borders; set by each individual; vary according to time, settings, relationships, and moods, and circumstances. What is & isn't okay with you. Your own set of rules for interactions - with their own set of consequences.

It can be helpful to consider what type of boundaries you tend toward in general. Are your boundaries often diffuse, meaning you tend to fuse emotionally with others, have intense reactions to stress, and give to the point of your own detriment in relationships? Or conversely, do you tend to have rigid boundaries, meaning you typically resist change, are often overly independent, and unrealistically evaluate yourself? Knowing which side you are likely to fall on can help you to check your tendencies and come into more balance with firm but permeable boundaries.

STEPS TO SUPPORT SETTING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

1- Feel into what you want your boundaries to be as a mother. What is it no longer okay for people to say and do around you or to you? What will you do if someone crosses a boundary?

2- Directly communicate when someone has crossed one of your newly established boundaries.

3- Commit to following through with your own consequences - even if the other person may be unhappy over it.

4- Consider altering your involvement in any relationship in which the person consistently disrespects the boundaries you have set.

AREA TO CONSIDER WHEN SETTING BOUNDARIES

- Visitation and visitors those first few days/weeks-perhaps establish a roughly set visiting time and duration. This will allow everyone rest and minimal exposure to germs
- House chores & shopping-delegate out or say “screw it can wait.” These are great things for the grandparents, godparents and brother-in-law and sister-in-law to do.
- Self-care- Prioritize some self care. This can be as simple as holding firm to the rule of you sleep when baby sleep (the dishes, laundry, cooking, etc can wait), or taking the time for your sitz bath, letting papa or partner take baby and you take a shower all alone in the quiet. Do something that feels good and helps you heal. Ok, even if that means just laying quietly and staring at your beautiful baby for hours, but do it while someone else makes you food!
- Giving yourself permission to rely on your partner and support system, whoever that may be. Its ok and great to use what ya got. In fact, I am pretty sure that partners are especially ready to dive into being a part of things now that baby is on the outside.
- It is critical, even with young children, to carve out sacred time for yourself. Even if it's just five minutes a day or one hour a week, you need time to come back to yourself -without your baby. We suggest a special space in your home where you can get quiet and be uninterrupted. You may laugh at this, but we promise it is possible. It might require some work on the front end to delegate to your partner, family, or friends and to ask for what you really need. And the impact of time for yourself is invaluable!

JOIN A NEW MOMS GROUP OR BREASTFEEDING GROUP

Another great way to get some emotional support and empathy is to join a breastfeeding group, if you are breastfeeding (although in my experience they can be helpful for many kinds of feeding issues) or some type of new moms group. For example there is a group called The Village Moms Groups that is a group of moms that support each other by taking on the “it takes a village” spirit. Groups like these can be so wonderful because most of the caregivers that attend are going through the same things that you are experiencing and can really help you feel like you're not alone or help with that feeling of isolation that can sometimes happen.

Self care

SLEEP

I know that the topic of sleep will make most of you laugh....I can hear you now, "Sleep, what is sleep." Sleep is always the first thing people mention when you say that you are going to have a baby. And it is true you will be getting less sleep and depending on the personality and nature of your baby it could be significantly less than you are used to. With that said you do need to get sleep when you can for both healing and sanity purposes. I am far from being a sleep expert but here is what I know....

1. Be very serious about sleeping when the baby sleeps. Don't feel ashamed about it. Embrace it, love it, DO it! (everything else can wait). Laundry, dishes, food, shoot even a shower if that means you get some rest, it all can wait.
2. Set up your baby in a bassinet, crib, or co-sleep if that is what you are comfortable with but make it easy. Also be open to the fact that it is also okay to set the baby up in their own room if that means you will get more sleep. I myself didn't sleep that well when the baby was too close because every little peep, breath, squall, etc would keep me awake. So the moral of the story is experiment, be flexible and open to what you need. You aren't neglecting your kiddo by putting them in their own space so you can sleep or by putting them in bed with you if that relaxes you.
3. Get baby on a good solid schedule from the beginning, this includes feeding, not only is it good for them but for you. Establish their bedtime ritual from the start. For me and my little it has always been a warm bath, baby massage, story books and bed. My daughter is 4 and that is still our ritual. This sets up their little bodies and minds with an expectation and the security of knowing what is coming. It makes a big difference.

I don't have any magic sage advice, nothing groundbreaking, or big revelations. All I can say when it comes to sleep is get it when you can!



YONI AKA VAGINAL CARE & BUM CARE

So as you can imagine after you have ejected a baby out of your nether regions things are going to be sore, a bit painful and susceptible to infection. You will also be dealing with some bleeding as well, so keeping things clean and promoting healing are very important.

If you deliver in a hospital they will probably toss you some witch hazel soaked pads, tell you to take your ibuprofen and call it good. I am here to tell you there is more you can do.

SITZ BATH

What is a sitz bath?

A sitz bath is a shallow pool of warm water that only covers the lady bits or up to the hips. You can use your bathtub or you can get a special basin that attaches to the toilet. If you are going to use your bathtub you want to make sure to have someone clean the tub well for you. Note: I specifically said to have someone else clean the tub. Please don't be bending over and scrubbing a tub after you just had a baby.

Why use a sitz bath?

Sitz baths are used to reduce inflammation, promote healing by increasing circulation and generally keeping things clean to reduce the risk of infection. This is great for postpartum care and an added bonus is that the herbs can smell so lovely.

Where do I get a sitz bath?

Below I have included two recipes of herbal sitz baths that you can put together for yourself and then have on hand when the baby arrives. However, if that seems like just one more thing for you to have to do before the baby comes you can find all kinds of ready make sitz bath concentrates. One good brand that comes to mind is MotherLove. They make an organic liquid concentrate that is just poured into the bath water. You can also find some pre-made dried herbal baths too. Oftentimes local herb shops and apothecaries will have a premade blend. Moon Dance Botanicals makes premade sitz baths for example.

As far as sourcing your herbs for creating your own soaks a few places I know of are Holistic Pathways, Herbs & Arts, Apothecary Tinctura and Urban Herbs in Aspen will drop ship to you but they mostly specialize in Chinese herbs. However if you tell them what you are looking for I am sure they can consult with you and develop a bath for you. You can source them online as well.

*One note when putting together your own sitz bath if you don't have all the herbs on the list even some of them will be beneficial.

SITZ BATH RECIPES

1 cup Epsom salts or unprocessed sea salt
2 oz witch hazel
2 oz of chamomile
2 oz plantain leaf
2 oz of yarrow
2 oz calendula
3-5 drops of high quality lavender essential oil

Another variation

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup comfrey leaf
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup lavender
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup plantain leaf
 $\frac{1}{2}$ red raspberry
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup yarrow
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup calendula
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup shepherd's purse
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup urva ursi leaf
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sea salt or Epsom salt



Instructions:

Super simple: compile all your ingredients in a big bowl and give it a nice mix and store in a big glass jar. You can keep it stored in a cool, dark place for up to 1 year!.

How to use:

For bath use: add 1 cup of herbs to 2 quarts of boiling water. Remove water from heat and let sit for 20 minutes. Strain and add to a bath and soak for 20 minutes. Both mom and baby can soak to speed cord and perineum healing.

I think that opinions on how frequently you should use a sitz bath varies. I think once a day is a good call but some midwives would advise up to 3 times a day.

Some other ideas for use are to

- Brew with the above ratios and add to a Peri Bottle for use after going to the bathroom.
- Pour some pre-brewed herbal mix on to pads and freeze for a pain relieving ice pack.

VAGINAL STEAMS AKA YONI STEAMS

Another tool that you can use is vaginal steaming. A practice that is done on every continent around the world but is not used much here in the states. I am here to help bring back the vaginal steam. Vaginal steaming is amazing for treating most things women. It can be used for before and after pregnancy. It can be helpful for women dealing with fertility issues, menstrual irregularities, infection, menopausal symptoms and for us, in this case postpartum recovery. Like the sitz bath you will be using water and herbs to create an herbal steam that penetrates deep into the vagina and help clear old tissue out, soothe, and heal.

Postpartum Vaginal Steaming Benefits

- Heals vaginal canal opening
- Reduces skin swelling
- Clears out lochia
- Shrinks Hemorrhoids
- Assists with weight loss
- Helps uterus reduce in size
- Lifts uterus and organs into place
- Addresses pre-pregnancy menstrual cycle imbalances
- Stimulates breast milk production
- Reduces incidence of infection
- Helps disinfect and heal stitches and tears
- Relieves postpartum contractions
- Helps regain sexual pleasure

The basic idea is that you place the selected herbs into hot water and then either sit on a chair with a hole in it or stand over the steam while covered up and let the steam bathe your womb. The steam can be done as soon as the bleeding post delivery has stopped which is usually 3-4 days after birth. Historically it would have been the midwife that would administer help with the steam, but now days as we use midwives less and less, and are less connected with our bodies the practice and become more obscure.

However, there is more and more research being done on the benefits and efficacy and it is slowly becoming practiced more here in the US.

If this is something you are interested in setting up to do at home please contact me, or have your dula, midwife, or loved one contact me and I can help you with obtaining herbs and teaching you how to do a steam at home.

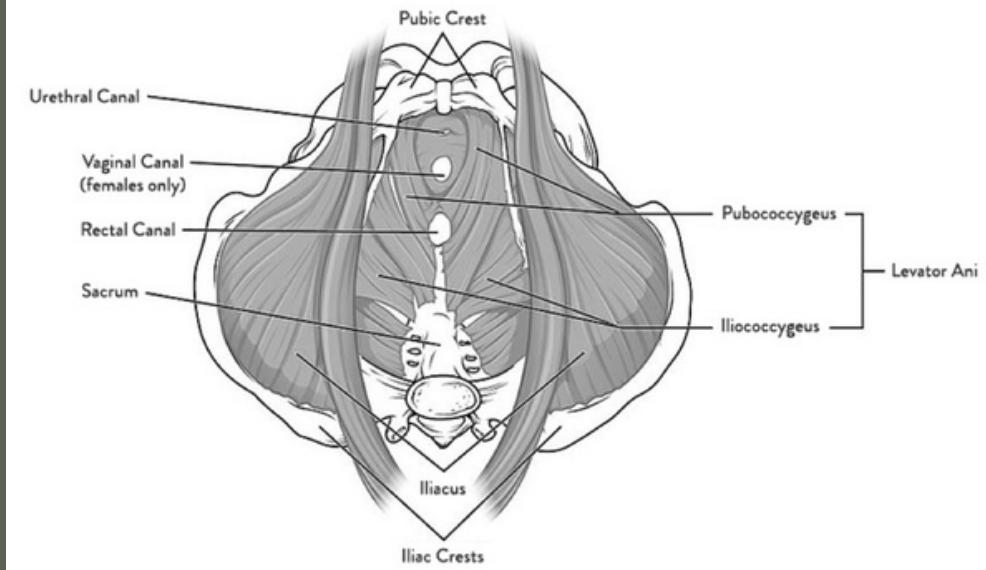
PELVIC FLOOR HEALTH

What is your pelvic floor and where is it located? In the female pelvis, the pelvic floor muscles are a sling of muscles forming a muscular support around the front (urethra), middle (vagina) and back (anus) passages in the pelvis.

It is these muscles that help to relax and contract your anus and the urethra, helps to hold the baby in place and then allow us to push for a vaginal birth. These muscles also help with sexual function and finally with hip stability.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER BIRTH?

These muscles during birth will have been stretched, their may have been tearing and general fatigue to the whole pelvic girdle. As a result most women will experience some level of postpartum incontinence. In some more severe cases there could be prolapse of organs.



HOW DO I ACTIVATE MY PELVIC FLOOR MUSCLES?

The most important part of completing pelvic floor exercises is the technique. To correctly activate these muscles you need to 'squeeze and lift' the sling of muscles around your front, middle and back passages. Often squeezing without lifting leads to a bearing down of your pelvic floor.

Like most other muscles, the pelvic floor responds well to progressive strength training. Initially start by mastering the 'knack' of a squeeze and lift without activating your glutes or abdominal muscles. It is also important to continue breathing normally and avoid holding or drawing in your breath. This technique can be performed in lying, sitting or standing.

Lying down will be the easiest as there is less gravity on your pelvic floor. Once the technique has been established, build up the repetitions to about 10 repetitions.

GOALS:

1. To always switch on and let go with control.
2. Don't allow your muscles to fade out during the hold.
3. Allow just as much rest break as activation time.
4. If you can't feel the letting go or feel that the strength of the lift is reducing, your muscles are most likely fatiguing so have a rest.
5. Only progress one variable at a time; length of hold, number of repetitions or position of exercise.
6. **The aim for dosage is a 3-10 second hold, repeated 5-10 times, and completed 3 times a day.**

THE KEGAL

Learn to switch on your pelvic floor and slowly build up your endurance (length of hold) and repetitions until you are able to comfortably hold up to 10 seconds. The aim is to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles and to do that you need to create fatigue. So once you get the correct technique, try to engage these muscles at 80% strength and work towards the dosage of 3-10 second holds, 5-10 receptions, 3 sets.

1. Pick a posture which feels right for you - lying on your back, side, sitting, standing.
2. SQUEEZE AND LIFT the muscles around your FRONT, MIDDLE & BACK PASSAGES.
3. The lift needs to stay up... don't hold it so long that your contraction drops off without your control.
4. The length of rest is the same if not longer than the time of contraction. You're pelvic floor is a muscle - give it time to recover.
5. You have to continue to breathe normally - NEVER HOLD YOUR BREATH.
6. Its also a good idea to avoid starting the contraction by breathing in.

WHAT SHOULD I NOT DO?

1. Hold your breath.
2. Thinking that holding these muscles all day is a good thing.
3. Squeeze your abdominals instead of your pelvic floor.
4. Squeeze your bum muscles instead of your pelvic floor.
5. Hold each contraction until it fails and drops without your control.
6. Do the exercises sitting on a open toilet.
7. Practice your exercises while weeing.
8. Push down on your pelvic floor.



If you are experiencing symptoms of urinary or fecal incontinence, a sensation of heaviness and weakness and definitely if there is any pain during daily tasks or sexual intercourse - I would strongly encourage an internal pelvic floor assessment with a Continence Physiotherapist, Doctor, or Gynecologist to determine the cause of your symptoms.

Not all pelvic floor issues are due to muscle weakness. In some cases there can be muscle trigger points, overactivity and scar tissue from previous tears etc. It's definitely not a 'one size fits all' principle for pelvic floor exercises. Like with all other muscle injuries, you generally benefit from an assessment of the cause of the problem before commencing rehabilitation

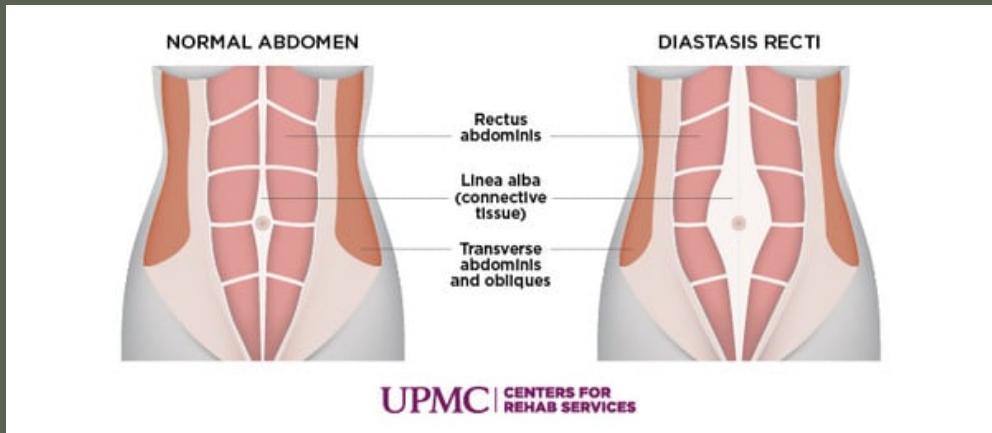
Here are a few places that are great for specialized work with pelvic floor issues.

- Providence Physical Therapy with Dr Laura LaPorta PhD, PT, OCS. Dr LaPorta comes very highly recommended
- N2 Physical Therapy. They are also great and the nice thing about them is that they have three locations so depending on where you live, they should have you covered.
- Dawn Sandelciti PT, RCMT, BCB-PMD. Dawn also come highly recommended for her work with pelvic floor problems.

DIASTASIS RECTI

First things first. What is a diastasis recti? Basically it is where the muscles of your abdomen, rectus abdominis, have stretched apart, and your transverse abdominis, obliques and the connective tissue in between have weakened and you are left with a gap. The result is that even after losing your pregnancy weight you tummy may seem to have a noticeable gap between the muscles or you are left with a postpartum “pouch.” Well there are definitely ways that you can heal this and there are also a few things that you shouldn’t be doing to heal it as well.

Note: As with anything major like, starting an exercise plan, please consult with your Dr. and get the all clear to begin.



Let's go over a few things that you shouldn't do first.

Crunches!!- Don't do them and stay away from them. They don't do much good for the everyday person, much less someone who has had a baby and has a stretched belly and weakened pelvic floor.

Planks- Hold off on these. While they are a good exercise, postpartum they aren't the best idea. They put a lot of strain forward onto a weak abdomen.

Don't bend straight forward to pick things up (like our other children, etc.) allowing your belly to hang forward and all your organs to put pressure on your weak front.

Running- Use caution please!! Please make sure that you get the go ahead from your Dr. before venturing into this arena, and I am not just talking about running days after birth I am talking about weeks or even months after. Not only does running require strength in the core but also the pelvic floor (which we talked about earlier). So if your belly is feeling really weak and your pelvic floor is weak (peeing when you sneeze or even jump) I would say do the pelvic floor work and some of the core work before you dive into a running routine.

Here is a wonderful website <https://physicalkitchness.com/healing-diastasis-recti/> with some awesome photos and descriptions of the types of exercises that are safe and beneficial to do after the all clear from your dr..

BELLY BINDING OR BENGKUNG

I thought I would mention belly binding here. I am not going to say a lot of specifics about this particular practice because I have not done it personally, but I do want you to know that it is an option. Some women find it very helpful and it is something that you can research for yourself or ask your midwife, doulas, or doctor about.

Holistic Pathways in Englewood does classes on Bengkung.

Belly Binding or Bengkung is practiced in many parts of the world and is basically what it sounds like. The belly is wrapped or bound in corset type deal in order to help heal abdomen, help lift the organs, support the lower back and hips and reshape the ribcage. I am not 100% sure but the binding is not taking the place of diet and exercise for healing but simply a tool to help with the process.



BOOBIES!

A few things that I think are important to know about with postpartum boobies and the new job they are about to take on.

Have a good lactation consultant on hand. I have two super awesome people to recommend. If you are struggling with breastfeeding they can help you in so many ways, technical support, ie the actual physical act, emotional support, and family support.

Also check out a breastfeeding support group, a great local resource is The Mama Hood. They have a wonderful group run by certified lactation consultants. This is a much cheaper way to get some of your less serious questions answered. They are wonderful women to have in your corner when you have questions, like "What the heck is "letdown?" Why is this hurting like a Mother %@^!%@&^%@, Is my baby getting enough milk? How much is enough? I can't get them to latch, etc. This is also a great way to connect with other new moms who are going through the same kinds of challenges. Plus you get to see all kinds of adorable new squishy babies.

These two women are amazing at their jobs and are wonderful resources to have.

Gina Penka Corriveau, CPM, RN, IBCLC (BS, ASM)- Her website is Moonbabies Birth Services <http://www.moonbabies.net/>

Amanda Ognden, IBCLC, RN- You can find her at The Mama Hood <http://www.themamahood.com/>

MASTITIS, BLOCKED MILK DUCTS & ENGORGEMENT

Mastitis

The most common symptoms are chills and fever (101 or higher), redness in the breast, pain in the breast all the time or while breastfeeding, swelling, sometimes a lump, discharge from the nipple. Generally you will just feel like crap. Treatment usually involves seeing your doctor and a course of antibiotics, but I will also say that a good acupuncturist can do wonders for this condition, especially with the help of herbal medicines.

Blocked milk ducts

The most common symptoms of a clogged duct include: pain in a specific location in the breast, swollen, tender lump in the breast, possible heat and swelling, slow milk flow on one side, skin that looks lumpy in one area, a small white dot on the nipple called a milk bleb. Treatment for a clogged duct is usually much easier than mastitis but it also isn't as serious as mastitis. Often times simple hot compresses and massage in the area is all it takes to clear the clog. Speaking from experience it is painful at first but once you apply the hot compress it will soften and make the massage a bit less painful. Just keep at it and it will clear.

Engorgement

Engorgement is basically when your boobies are filled beyond the max and the tension of that milk builds up and you feel like they are going to pop! In all seriousness though the signs of engorgement are the skin around the breast will tighten and can even look shiny, they can feel hot to the touch, tenderness and or throbbing. The areola will also typically get very hard as well.

Other post partum Consideration

PLACENTA ENCAPSULATION

What is it?

Placenta encapsulation is where you save your own placenta afterbirth and it is preserved, powdered and then put into capsules. You then take them as a supplement postpartum. Placenta has been used in traditional Chinese medicine for centuries but here in the states the idea of using human placenta as a supplement is sometimes met with criticism or controversy.

Why would I do this?

It is thought that the placenta contains nutrients, vitamins and hormones that help to restore and balance the postpartum body. The idea is that this organ that was nourishing and protecting your baby can now nourish and protect you once that baby is born. There are both scientific studies and surveys that show positive feedback and outcome with the postpartum consumption of placenta. Participants indicated feeling of improvement in things like mood, energy and decrease in bleeding.

How do I get this done?

There are people who specialize in the safe handling and preparation of your placenta. Because it is an organ there are special safety guidelines and handling practices that are set in place by OSHA. So your responsibilities will be finding a trusted encapsulator and if delivering at a hospital you will have to make sure that it is written into your birth plan and that all the appropriate paperwork is signed to be able to keep it. You will also have to bring a cooler and ice to keep it, but be sure to ask your encapsulator what you need to do for them specifically.

This website findplacentaencapsulation.com is a great resource for what questions you should ask when you are finding someone to handle your encapsulation. They don't have any listings for finding a specialist here in CO but their questions are great.

Here are a couple local places to check, but obviously you can do your own research and find a good fit for you.

- The Transcendent Placenta LLC
- Doulas of Denver
- Ubuntu Wellness



CORD BLOOD SAVING

Despite this being a "postpartum" care guide I hope that this information comes to you before the baby comes so that you can be more prepared for the baby once they arrive. Having said that I wanted to mention cord blood saving so that if it is something you feel like you want to do you can prepare for it. This is a topic that I personally don't have any experience with but I wanted to mention it and give some info so that you can at least have a jumping off point to get the process started.

What is cord blood?

Cord blood is the blood that is inside the umbilic cord that has been connecting you and baby during your whole pregnancy. This blood is often thrown away but it is now saved by parents to be stored in case baby were to ever need it for future health reasons.

What can it be used for and why would you save it?

The cord blood is full of stem cells, in fact it contains more than 10 times more than bone marrow and is safer in the sense that it rarely carries infectious diseases and much less likely to be rejected like adult stem cells. It is also very easy to collect and is not harmful for baby or momma.

The stem cells that are collected can then be used to treat cancer, blood diseases like anemia, and some immune system disorders.

Types of Blood Banks

If you have decided to store your baby's cord blood there are two types of banks to consider. There are public banks and private banks. At a public bank the blood is stored for free but it is also available for public use and can not always be used specifically for, say, a family member. A private bank charges a yearly fee but it is yours and your families, no sharing required.

If you have more questions or wanna know more here is a link to a nice summary on The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists web page. It gives more details and answers some common questions about it. <https://www.acog.org/Patients/FAQs/Cord-Blood-Banking?IsMobileSet=false>

Nutrition

Without prescribing to a specific diet or plan there are some pieces of advice and resources that I would like to share with you so that eating well and regularly will be easier and more convenient during the postpartum period.

We all know that nutrition is important to health in general but postpartum nutrition is important not only for you as you heal but for the baby as well, especially if you are going to be breastfeeding (some studies show that breastfeeding can burn anywhere between 200 to 500 calories per day). So this extra expenditure of calories requires support through nutritious foods and nutrition. There are a lot of sources out there that would say that your diet doesn't affect your breast milk but I personally think that it does. So regardless of what you believe nutrition is VERY important for your body as you recover your strength, heal your wounds, rebalance your hormones, and make milk for your little one.

Here are some of the tips and ideas that I thought to be most helpful.

1. Have you ever heard of Meal Train? I think this can be wonderful for those of you out there who have a load of boisterous friends and family who want to be involved but you may want them to, kindly stay away for just a bit. The basic idea is that you have a trusted person set up a calendar where people sign up to prepare food for one day and each day gets filled by the next person, etc. so the next thing you know you have the whole month of food taken care of.

Check out Mealtrain.com They can make calendars, send e-invites, etc.

*Note: The down side to this is that you may get food that you aren't the biggest fan of or may not be the most nutritious. I am sure there is a way you can specify things but there is always the risk of eating tacos and chocolate chip cookies for two weeks, and though that may not sound that bad, it is not always the most helpful for revitalizing the body. People want so badly to be helpful when the baby arrives but not always attuned to others true needs.

2. Another great resource that I would like to share with you is called the Becoming Mama Healing Guide & Postpartum Meal Plan. This program was put together by my mentor and an amazing fertility expert and acupuncturist Katie Altneu. She has put together a 4 week meal plan that was specifically designed to support recovery, milk supply and mood. The most wonderful thing about it is that it includes a 103 page e book filled with recipes, shopping lists, and meal plans. Easy for anyone to follow. It lays everything out, even what to make that you can freeze ahead of time.

- Week 1 is formulated to rebuild iron and mineral stores, with lots of protein, antioxidants, and collagen to support tissue repair.
- Week 2 continues the goals of week 1, but with slightly less meat and iron.
- Week 3 is designed to support your milk supply, with galactagogues and therapeutic foods to boost milk supply and flow.
- Week 4 targets progesterone and estrogen balance and liver detoxification pathways, to help stabilize your mood.

If this is something that you would be interested in checking out head over to my website Nourishingenergyacu.com and under the Women's Health section there is a link to The Postpartum Healing Guide & Meal Plan. Or you can talk with me and I can get you to where you need to be.

In addition to these two resources I wanted to share a couple recipes that I personally like. A sweet treat, a nourishing soup and a hearty main dish.

Our sweet treat is a lactation cookie but delicious cookies for everyone. Who doesn't need cookies as they heal. You deserve it, you just had a baby! This particular one was developed by a lactation consultation.

These simple lactation cookies are nutrient-dense and offer a boost of B-vitamins, iron and other minerals, healthy fats, and probiotics that are helpful for postpartum and breastfeeding mamas.

Yield: 1 batch Author: Crystal Karges, MS, RDN, IBCLC

- 2 Cups Whole Rolled Oats (Old Fashioned)
- 1 Cup All-Purpose Flour
- 1.5 Tbsp Ground Flaxseed
- 4 Tbsp Brewer's Yeast
- $\frac{2}{3}$ Cup Light Brown Sugar
- 1 tsp Vanilla Extract
- 1 tsp Baking Soda
- 1 cup Coconut Oil (solid)
- 2 Eggs
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon sea salt
- $\frac{3}{4}$ Cup Cup Chocolate Chips (Choose Dairy-Free Option if Needed)

Optional

- Ground Hemp Seeds, Raisins, Dried Cranberries, Chopped Walnuts, Sliced Almonds, etc.
- Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
- In a large bowl, use a hand mixer to combine coconut oil and brown sugar - mix until fully combined. Add vanilla extract and eggs, mix well.
- In a separate bowl, combine rolled oats, flour, ground flaxseed, brewers yeast, baking soda, and sea salt. Gently stir to combine.
- Slowly add dry ingredients to wet ingredients while mixing on low. Use a mixer to incorporate all ingredients until well combined. Add chocolate chips and fold into the mix gently.
- Scoop dough onto lined cookie sheets and bake for 12-15 minutes, or until cookies are turning golden brown. Allow to cool before you enjoy eating!

*Note: These cookies can stay fresh in an airtight container for up to 1 week, or you can keep extras in your freezer! If you are a pregnant mama, these would be great to make as part of your postpartum freezer stash of meals before your baby comes!

The next two recipes are from one of my favorite cookbooks called Ancient Wisdom, Modern Tradition by Yuan Wand, Warren Sheir, and Mikao Ono. This book is written using Asian method and incorporates various herbs to enhance the dishes.

THIS DISH IS CALLED CHAMPION CHICKEN WITH GOJI BERRIES.

It is particularly good to increase your strength after childbirth. In Traditional Chinese Medicine it is used to warm the stomach, boost the qi, nourish the blood, strengthen the liver and kidney.

Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic peeled and minced
- 1 ($\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 inch) piece of fresh ginger, peeled and minced
- 1 roasting chicken, skinned and cut into pieces or 3 to 4 lbs of skinless legs and/or breasts
- 2 medium green onions cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ inch pieces, roots and tough tips discarded
- 3-4 tablespoons of rice wine or dry sherry
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce or liquid aminos (or to taste)
- 2 tablespoons (30 grams) goji berries
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups water, vegetable or chicken stock
- 1 teaspoon of dark sesame oil

Directions:

1. Heat oil in a pan, add garlic and ginger. Cook until the garlic is golden (about 5 minutes).
2. Place chicken, garlic, ginger, green onions, wine, soy sauce, goji berries, and water or stock in pot.
3. Bring mixture to a boil and then cover and lower heat to a simmer. Cook for about 30 min or until the chicken is cooked through.
4. Sprinkle the sesame oil on the top as a finishing touch,
5. Serve in a bowl with some of the broth, or on top of rice with the broth as a gravy.

NEXT UP LIFE-FORCE CHICKEN AND MUSHROOMS IN WINE

Next up Life-Force Chicken and Mushrooms in Wine

This recipe is also good for moms trying to build back their strength and variations are very common throughout Asia to make postpartum. In Traditional Chinese Medicine it is used for building blood, strengthen qi, and harmonize the middle.

Ingredients

- ½ oz (10 grams) dried black wood ear mushrooms
- 8 (1½ oz dried; ½ lbs fresh) dried or fresh shiitake mushrooms
- ¼ cup soy sauce, or liquid aminos
- 2 tablespoons rich wine or medium-dry sherry
- 1 teaspoon dark sesame oil
- 1 (1 inch) piece of fresh ginger peeled and minced
- 1 to 2 cloves garlic peeled and minced
- 3 green onions, chopped into ¼ inch pieces, roots and tough tips discarded
- 1 tablespoon powdered kudzu, arrowroot, cornstarch or other thickener
- 1 ½ cups water plus extra for soaking
- 1 small chicken, cut up or 3-4 pounds of chicken pieces.

Directions

1. Soak the wood ear mushrooms in warm water till soft about 30min (they are going to expand a lot) If you are using dried shiitake mushrooms also soak them for 30min until soft. If using fresh just rinse them
2. Cut the wood ear into 1 inch pieces. Cut tough stems off of the shiitake and discard, you can also chop the shiitake if you want.
3. Create a marinade by mixing together the soy sauce, rice wine vinegar, sesame oil, ginger, garlic, and green onions. Mix your thickener of choice in small bowl with about 2 tablespoons of water to keep it from clumping, then add to the marinade and stir until smooth
4. Place the chicken pieces, wood ear, and shiitake into the marinade, toss well to coat, then let sit at room temperature, for about 30min.
5. Pour 1 ½ cups of water into a heavy pot and add the chicken, wood ear, shiitake and marinade. Bring to a boil, then lower heat and simmer for about 30 min, or until the chicken is cooked.

I hope you were able to find something useful out of this compilation of information, and to wrap things up I just want to emphasize the importance of listening to yourself and your needs. Remember that you ultimately know best. If something doesn't feel right in your body or if emotionally you need more support reach out for support. It doesn't matter where you go, but get the help you deserve. You can go to your doctor, your family, friends or even your acupuncturist. You have been through so much and you need and deserve all the care in the world.

Big thank you to Cynthia St Claire, a very gifted therapist, who helped with flushing out and contributing to the section on mental health.