



A GUIDE TO

# Preparing for Postpartum

The postpartum period starts immediately after birth and lasts for 12 weeks. The World Health Organization describes the postnatal period as the most critical and yet the most neglected phase in the lives of mothers and babies. This guide will help you feel more prepared.



# Postpartum

Many of us spend so much time learning about labor and birth, but I've found that so many mamas feel unprepared for what comes after birth.

As an educator, doula, lactation consultant, and mama myself, one of my biggest goals is to help you feel empowered and supported through every step of the journey. Preparing for postpartum is one of the best ways to set yourself up for a smoother recovery, and it's something I emphasize with all my clients.

If you hire me as your doula, we'll dive deep into everything you need to know about pregnancy, birth, and postpartum recovery. But for now, I invite you to read through this gentle overview of what to expect in the early postpartum days.

Whether you're just about to give birth or you've recently stepped into motherhood, welcome. You are an incredibly amazing mama.

You might be surprised by what this season looks and feels like, and that's okay. The postpartum period is often reported as the most challenging part of the pregnancy journey. It's not always rainbows and butterflies. In fact, around 80% of mamas experience something called the baby blues, a temporary emotional dip that can feel like a mild form of depression (we'll talk more about that in a bit).

You're not alone if you find yourself feeling overwhelming joy and overwhelming sadness all at once. This is all part of the process. Come back to this guide whenever you need support, and remember, I'm here for you every step of the way.

# Postpartum Care Tips

**Follow these tips and tricks to nurture yourself postpartum:**

- Sleep - lack of sleep can exacerbate the feelings that come along with postpartum and can be the hardest part of life with a newborn - give preference to sleep and know that even a 30-minute catnap can help!
- Prioritize your time - being intentional with your limited time is a big one when it comes to the postpartum period! Try to do the most important things first and save the least important things for later!
- Drop expectations - you're not going to be able to do it all so drop the expectations! A shower and a walk to the mailbox might be all you can accomplish some days - and that's ok!
- Nourish your body - your goal should be to heal and recover your body by eating a well-balanced diet, drinking plenty of fluids, getting fresh air, and again prioritizing sleep!
- Establish boundaries - whether it comes to unwarranted advice or an invasion of personal space please know it's ok to say "no thank you," "not today," and "we are trying things our way right now."
- Trust yourself - you may not know everything right away, but you're not supposed to - you and your baby are learning together. Trust that you are doing the best you can and let your instincts guide the way.
- Ask for help - have your postpartum tribe lined up and know you're not supposed to do this alone! Don't be afraid to get the help you deserve. That's why I am here!

# Postpartum Prep Checklist

## “Down There”

- ☐ pads in a variety of sizes
- ☐ postpartum underwear
- ☐ witch hazel pads
- ☐ peri bottle
- ☐ perineal spray
- ☐ flushable wipes
- ☐ sitz bath
- ☐ epsom salt
- ☐ ice packs/padsicles

## "Boobies"

- ☐ nursing clothing (bras, tanks)
- ☐ nursing pads
- ☐ nipple balm/butter
- ☐ nipple gel pads
- ☐ haakaa
- ☐ nursing pillow
- ☐ warm/cold packs
- ☐ breast pump
- ☐ silverettes (optional)

## “Down There”

- ☐ hemorrhoid cream/wipes
- ☐ stool softeners
- ☐ squatty potty

## "All Over"

- ☐ water bottle
- ☐ belly support band
- ☐ pain relievers (otc or prescribed)
- ☐ loose-fitting comfortable clothing
- ☐ easy to grab snacks
- ☐ essential oils
- ☐ postnatal vitamins
- ☐ compression socks (if needed)
- ☐ postpartum tea

# Postpartum Warning Signs

**Call 911**  
if you experience...

- ☐ Pain in the chest
- ☐ Obstructed breathing or shortness of breath
- ☐ Seizures
- ☐ Thoughts of harming or hurting yourself or baby

**Call your  
healthcare  
provider**  
if you experience...

- ☐ Bleeding, soaking a pad in an hour, or blood clots larger than a golf ball
- ☐ Incision that is not healing, opening, bleeding, or has foul discharge
- ☐ Red or swollen leg or groin that is painful or warm to touch
- ☐ Temperature of 100.4 or higher
- ☐ Headache that does not get better even after taking medications, dizziness, swelling, vision changes

Additional indications to call your provider include painful or minimal urination, increasing or persistent pain, sore breasts or red streaks on breasts, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea, unable to move bowels, foul-smelling vaginal discharge, sadness or anxiety lasting 2+ weeks

**\*In the case of an emergency call 911\***

# Perinatal Mood & Anxiety Disorders (PMADs) vs. Postpartum Adjustment

Perinatal mood and anxiety disorders are known as PMADs are a spectrum of emotional complications that can affect expectant or new parents at any point during pregnancy or the first year after birth. PMADs most commonly impact the birthing person, but fathers, partners, and adoptive parents can also experience anxiety, depression, and other mood disorders after the baby arrives. However, there is a period of "normal" postpartum adjustment. Research shows that 80% of mamas will experience the "baby blues", which is a mild form of depression and typically resolves within 2 weeks of birth.

Can occur during pregnancy through 1st year postpartum

Depression, bipolar, psychosis

General anxiety, panic, OCD, PTSD

Perinatal Mood  
&  
Anxiety Disorders  
(PMADS)

These changes interfering with day to day functioning

# Risk Factors PMADs

There are a variety of risk factors that can put you at an increased risk of PMAD. If you have any of the risk factors below, discuss them with your provider so you can work together to make a care plan. Perinatal mood and anxiety disorders are easily treated and within a short period of time, you will find yourself feeling significantly better! Treatment includes talk therapy, medication, support groups, or a combination. There is hope so please ask for help!

## **Some risk factors include:**

- A personal or family history of PMADs
- A personal or family history of depression, anxiety, or other mental health disorders
- A personal history of significant reactions to hormonal changes such as Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder or PMS Life stress including financial or marital stress
- Complications in pregnancy, birth, or breastfeeding
- A major recent life event such as loss, relocation, or job loss
- Fertility challenges Challenging labor and birth experiences including mothers whose infants are in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit and mothers of multiples
- Medical conditions including a thyroid imbalance and any form of Diabetes

# Signs and Symptoms PMADS

## **Prenatal and Postpartum Depressive Disorders**

Symptoms may include:

- Feelings of sadness, frequent crying, or weepiness
- Lack of interest in the baby or trouble feeling connected to the baby
- Sleep and appetite disturbances
- Feelings of anger or irritability
- Feelings of guilt, shame, or hopelessness
- Loss of pleasure from activities usually found enjoyable
- Possible thoughts of harming yourself or the baby

## **Prenatal and Postpartum Anxiety Disorders**

Symptoms may include:

- Constant worry
- Feeling like something bad is going to happen
- Racing thoughts
- Sleep or appetite disturbances
- Inability to sit still
- Physical symptoms such as dizziness, hot flashes, and nausea

If you are experiencing any of the above symptoms or are at all concerned about your mental health, reach out to your health care provider or a mental health specialist ASAP. They will work with you to find the right providers to create a treatment plan.



# Postpartum Adjustment

## "The Baby Blues"

After birth, there are a variety of hormone shifts, lifestyle changes, and physical & emotional transformations that can affect how a new mom feels.

Research shows that 80% of new moms experience what is called the "baby blues."

One minute you feel overjoyed and full of love and the next you're crying because you have no idea what you're doing and feel overwhelmed or anxious. Typically the baby blues last about 2-3 weeks and then wear off!

If you find that the below symptoms last longer than 3 weeks - please reach out to your healthcare provider.

### **Symptoms of the "baby blues" include:**

- irritability
- restlessness
- anxiety
- sadness
- fatigue
- mood swings
- poor concentration
- insomnia
- tearfulness
- not feeling like yourself

# How To Support Your Partner Postpartum

Research shows having a supportive partner during the postpartum period can reduce rates of postpartum anxiety and depression, improve breastfeeding success rates, and lead to better overall family bonding - just to name a few!

## **Here are some ways to support your partner:**

- When your significant other is feeding the baby - check in to see what she needs- water, snacks, phone charger, remote, book, etc
- Be there- just being there and offering encouragement, positive words of support, and love is huge
- Surprise her - do something romantic, get her flowers, her favorite takeout, a handwritten note
- Take turns with the middle of the night wake-ups, feeds, diaper changes-don't do them together because then everyone is tired
- Remind her to eat and drink because sometimes she won't remember to do this for herself
- Be gentle with each other and work together- everyone is learning how to adjust to their new role
- Jump in and help - do a diaper change, read the baby a book, give a bottle, sing, bath, etc
- Support your partner in their feeding goals - whether breastfeeding or formula feeding. Help prepare, wash, assemble bottles and formula if formula feeding and if breastfeeding help your partner get into comfortable breastfeeding positions, assist with latch, put blankets/pillows around partner for comfort



- Encourage her to be open with her feelings and emotions, to seek support and connection from other mothers, and check in with her to see how she's doing and feeling.
- 10. Let her talk about the birth - whether it was wonderful or not what she had hoped for or even discuss traumatic events.
- 11. Tell her how amazing she is, what a good mother she is, how hard she is working to keep herself and your baby happy and well cared for, tell her how proud you are of her and how much you love her
- Don't expect anything from her - emotionally, physically, mentally, spiritually, house chores, etc.
- Don't be offended by the range of emotions that moms can feel in the first few weeks and months after birth
- Remind her of all the things she is doing right
- Help her take time for herself so she can sleep, shower, go for a walk, grab a coffee with a friend
- Take time for each other to bond - go for a walk together, watch a movie together, grab a coffee
- Try and keep up the house by doing the dishes, laundry, cooking, etc
- Take charge of visitors and arrange times that work and don't be afraid to say not today
- Remind her to be gentle with herself - her body, her mind, her spirit
- Be patient- life will look a little different with a tiny human around and you may not be the first thing on her mind- don't take lack of attention or interest in you personally
- Know that resuming sex may take a while so try not to have any expectations
- Remember it takes 40 weeks to grow and birth a human - it's going to take time for your partner to heal and feel like herself

# Physical Recovery

The emotional and physical changes that occur during pregnancy and postpartum may make you feel like you are a stranger in your own body - it's a huge adjustment, and I promise you're not making it up! The emotional aspect of postpartum is one piece of the "healing phase," and the physical recovery is another! When you combine these two, it can be quite overwhelming, and I find most mamas aren't aware of the physical changes that occur after birth.

You and your body have endured so much over the last several months, and you are incredible for not only growing this human but birthing them also. Be graceful with yourself and allow yourself to feel proud of everything you have accomplished. Some days you may feel endless strength and beauty and the next you may feel like you'll never find "who you were before."

Know that "bouncing back" to who you were is not a thing. You too have been reborn - and I promise you will look completely different in this new role, and will be more beautiful than ever. Trust the process.



# Uterine Healing

Over the last 9 months, your uterus has grown from the size of a pear to the size of a watermelon and has housed your baby and your body's newest organ - the placenta. You will still look pregnant after your baby is born as it will take about 6 weeks for your uterus to return to "prepregnancy size." Where the placenta was attached to the uterus has left a wound about the size of a dinner plate that now has to heal. Postpartum bleeding is called lochia and will progress over about a 6 week period through 3 different bleeding stages. Some mamas are surprised to hear that this bleeding will occur whether you deliver vaginally or have a cesarean birth.

Lochia rubra (birth - 5 days postpartum) is bright red bleeding resembling a heavy period. You may see blood clots, pieces of the amniotic sac, vernix, or lanugo. Blood clots may form when blood isn't moving so when you go from sleeping, laying down, or even sitting to standing you may experience a gush of blood containing some clots. Any clots that are larger than a golf ball or saturating a pad an hour needs to be reported immediately to your healthcare provider.



Lochia serosa (5 days postpartum - 2 weeks postpartum) is moderate to light flow and blood transitions in color from deep red to light or brownish-red. If you notice that after day 5 you experience heavier bleeding, it may be your body's way of saying slow down. You may be able to transition from a maximum absorbency pad to a moderate pad. For some, this bleeding may last up to 4 weeks and for others, it may be only 10 days, but on average it lasts until about 2 weeks postpartum!



Lochia alba (2 weeks - 6 weeks postpartum) is more like vaginal discharge than bleeding and tends to be yellow-whitish in color. There typically is little to no bleeding and no blood clots during this stage. You may be able to wear simply a panty liner once you hit this stage of recovery.

# Uterine Healing

Your healthcare providers will be assessing your uterus after delivery by doing what's called "fundal checks," which is a massage of the uterus. For some, this can be uncomfortable; however, this is done to assess the tone of your uterus and bleeding. Your uterus is a muscle, so sometimes after it has "worked out" for hours or days, it may become what we call boggy or floppy, and this can cause bleeding and, in some cases, a postpartum hemorrhage. Staying hydrated and keeping your bladder empty can assist in healing and reducing bleeding. The first few days and weeks after birth, your bleeding will be heavy, so it is recommended to use disposable underwear and heavy to moderate pads until you can simply use a panty liner. Until you are cleared by your provider, nothing should be inserted into the vagina, as this can introduce bacteria and cause infection. This means no sex, tampons, douching, or even submerging yourself in a body of water.

You will likely experience contractions and cramping after delivery, especially if you're breastfeeding! Every time you breastfeed, oxytocin is released, a hormone that is responsible for many things, contractions being one of them! These contractions help reduce postpartum bleeding and return the uterus to baseline size. Many are caught off guard by the discomfort this can cause, and the more babies you have the worse this cramping gets! The good news - ibuprofen or acetaminophen are great to take to assist with pain management in the hours, days, and weeks that follow birth. If you experience cramping that is severe, abdominal pain, fever, aches, or chills - this can be a sign of an infection. Please notify your provider.



# Vaginal Healing

While our bodies (specifically our vaginas) are made to stretch, tear, swell, and expand for your baby, your vagina will now need to recover after delivery. Whether you delivered vaginally or had a cesarean birth you may experience vaginal discomfort. Research has shown that about 95% of mamas experience some degree of vaginal and perineal pain or discomfort after delivery- whether its swelling, burning, pulling, itching, or pain. Likely the more severe the injuries - the more discomfort you may experience and the longer it may take to heal. Studies also show that about 80% of mamas experience tearing during delivery, which is repaired with dissolvable sutures and typically heals within about 6 weeks.



## 1st degree

least severe, involving only the first layer of tissue around the vagina and perineal area



## 2nd degree

involve the skin and muscle of the perineum and might extend deep into the vagina



## 3rd degree

extends from vagina to your anus & involves injury to the skin and muscular tissue of the perineal area, as well as damage to the anal sphincter muscles



## 4th degree

least common & most severe - extends from the vagina, through the perineal area and anal sphincter muscles and into the rectum - may require surgical repair and take longer than 6 weeks to fully heal

# Vaginal Healing

Postpartum vaginal care is pretty simple; the main goals are to keep things clean, dry, and comfortable. Start with clean hands: washing before and after using the bathroom is one of the easiest ways to prevent infection. I also recommend using a peri-bottle filled with warm water and a gentle, unscented soap to rinse the area. Then, pat dry with a soft, fragrance-free wipe (no rubbing!). You'll also want to change your pad each time you use the restroom. Again, go for unscented products, since your body may be more sensitive than usual.

In the shower, it's totally fine to use a mild soap on the area, just let it gently wash over without scrubbing. Pat the area dry when you're done. If you start to notice small pieces of stitches falling out, don't worry, it's part of the healing process. But if anything feels like it's opening or pulling apart, reach out to your provider.

When you're sitting or resting, try to keep your legs together rather than sitting cross-legged. This simple shift can reduce tension on your stitches and help with healing. Also, don't forget to hydrate and take stool softeners regularly. Constipation can add unnecessary pressure and discomfort, especially in the perineal area.

## **Soothing Tools You'll Love:**

- Sitz Baths: You can do this using a sitz basin on the toilet or by filling a clean bathtub with 2–5 inches of warm water. Add Epsom salt, witch hazel, and a few drops of lavender essential oil. These quick soaks can help soothe your perineum (and even hemorrhoids if you're experiencing those).
- Padiscles (aka frozen pad magic): Take a menstrual pad and line it with witch hazel, aloe vera, and a drop or two of lavender oil. Wrap it back up, pop it in the freezer, and pull one out when you need a cool, comforting boost.

# Cesarean Birth Healing

If you have a cesarean birth, you'll likely be discharged home after about 3–4 nights in the hospital. By then, the worst of the pain may have passed, but don't be surprised if it creeps back in as you start to move around more at home. Please don't try to power through it; take your pain medications as prescribed, around the clock. Set an alarm if needed, even in the middle of the night.

If you're experiencing a lot of abdominal discomfort, an abdominal binder can offer some relief. Your birthplace may provide one, or you can easily order one online. Moving your body regularly (even gently) will go a long way in reducing swelling, pain, trapped gas, and general discomfort. Studies have even shown that chewing sugar-free gum can help wake up your digestive system and encourage the release of gas. Small things can make a big difference.

When you're getting out of bed, coughing, or laughing, try pressing a rolled-up towel, blanket, or pillow gently against your incision. This can provide support and help ease discomfort.

Every provider uses different methods to close a cesarean incision, stitches, staples, surgical glue, or steri-strips. Your care team will guide you on how to care for it, but in general, the goal is to keep the area clean and dry. In the shower, you don't need to scrub it, just let warm water and a gentle cleanser run over the area. Afterward, make sure the incision is completely dry before getting dressed.

In the days following your birth, you'll probably find that high-waisted, loose-fitting clothes are the most comfortable, think soft, breathable, and easy to wear.



# Postpartum Recovery

When I surveyed my community of mamas, 76% of mamas said they didn't feel prepared for postpartum. And when I asked why, most of the answers had to do with the physical and emotional realities of recovery, things they simply didn't know to expect. So many shared that they were caught off guard by how hard breastfeeding could be, how intense their emotions were, how different their bodies felt for weeks (or months), and how little people really talk about the truth of postpartum recovery.

But here's the good news: educating yourself during pregnancy about the postpartum period can make a real difference. Research shows that preparing ahead of time can help:

- Reduce postpartum anxiety and depression
- Boost your confidence in caring for yourself and your baby
- Strengthen your bond with your partner and your newborn

That's exactly why I'm here, to gently guide you through the things that often get left unsaid. The things your friends might not know how to talk about. You deserve to feel informed, supported, and never alone in this journey.

# Postpartum Recovery

## The Things No One Tells You

- **Incontinence** is common; however, this isn't "normal," so get help from a pelvic floor physical therapist even if you're dismissed by your providers.
- **Night sweats** - Prepare to sweat through your clothes and sheets as your hormones rebalance and fluid shifts occur. And yes... the smell can be intense!
- **Constipation** is often caused by hormonal changes, pain medications, and pelvic floor trauma. Stay hydrated, take stool softeners, and talk to your provider if things don't improve.
- **Hair loss** - Around 3 months postpartum, your hair may start shedding a lot. It's completely normal and usually stabilizes by 12 months. Expect baby hairs and a whole new hair texture.
- **Decreased libido** - occurs due to so many reasons, so while your partner may be ready to get back in the saddle, you may be experiencing vaginal dryness, pain, or a downright lack of interest! Foreplay and lubrication are your friends, and so is your pelvic floor specialist!
- **Hemorrhoids** - Months of pressure, hours of pushing, and weeks of constipation can all lead to hemorrhoids. They are common and, yes, truly a pain in the butt. There are treatments, so don't be afraid to ask.
- **Diastasis Recti** - This condition happens when your abdominal muscles separate during pregnancy. Ask your provider to check for it, and consider working with a postpartum physical therapist to safely rebuild core strength.
- **Painful periods** - When your cycle returns, your periods may feel more intense than they used to. That's normal as your hormones re-regulate, but if the pain feels severe, don't hesitate to bring it up.
- **Skin rashes/changes** - Hormonal fluctuations, stress, diet changes, and sleep deprivation can show up in your skin. Breakouts, dry patches, or new rashes are all common—and usually temporary.