

Balanced Mamas



The Fourth Trimester Guide to Nurturing The New Mother

Nurturing the New Mother

These simple postnatal care tips are to help guide you in healing your body after birth. We put so much emphasis on the birth itself but often neglect planning the postnatal recovery period.

In many cultures the postnatal period is a time devoted to healing and nurturing the mother, keeping her rested, warm and fed. It is a time of much change for the new mother as she adjusts to a new routine and trying to bond with her new baby, while she is also recovering from the physical demands that both pregnancy and birth have had on her body. Family, friends and neighbours surround the new mother to help care for both her and her new baby during this phase of 'fourth trimester', (the first 40 days of motherhood.) Cooking her healing and nourishing foods, taking over the cleaning and washing duties as well as helping nurse the baby.

Sadly, in a modern, western world this tradition of recuperation has been replaced by a pressure for women to bounce back quickly. Often family isn't close by to support the new mother and she is thrown quickly into nursing a new baby alone, who needs feeding, changing and nurturing constantly while having the demands of a household to run, cooking, cleaning and washing. All while her body is recovering. There is even more pressure on women who already has children, they are expected to bounce straight back into 'business as usual'.

A women's body goes through immense changes to accommodate her growing baby and giving birth is both physically and mentally demanding on her, leaving her nutritionally depleted and in need of replenishment. The physical recovery, a change in hormones and building a milk supply, whilst thrown quickly back into the pressures of everyday life can become very overwhelming and it is no surprise new mums end up exhausted and suffering baby blues.

In Eastern traditional cultures the postnatal time is for 'bringing warmth' to the mother and it is easy to understand the wisdom behind this. Did you know a women's blood volume almost doubles in pregnancy to support her growing baby, and after giving birth a mother loses much of this blood volume that helped keep her baby warm, hence losing warmth herself! A mother requires warming and nourishing foods, slowly cooked & easy to digest in the days after birth. Digestion is one of the body's main ways for detoxification, so as the body repairs, recycles water, and flushes out pregnancy hormones, smooth and easy digestion is important. Eastern cultures believe in honouring the new mother with food, warmth, rest, recovery and time to retreat and nest. Helping the mother to feel supported within her period of transition into motherhood. Mostly today in western cultures new mums do not have a huge network of family members and friends available to serve continued hot meals or to let her rest and retreat fully, but that doesn't mean a new mum 'cannot' be looked after and build a circle of support. We do not need to feel guilt for taking time to recover, you take roughly 40 weeks to carry your baby inside of you and so it is encouraged that you to take the 40 days to rest.

CIRCLE OF SUPPORT

What does a new mother need to feel supported?

Sometimes postnatal care can be as simple as a pair of ears to listen. It is a big thing adjusting to motherhood, getting to know your new baby and their needs while working on broken sleep and a rollercoaster of emotions. Sometimes you just need someone who listens and makes you feel supported. It could be someone to hold your precious baby so you can take a shower or someone to help stock your fridge full of food or pop some washing on or even cook a nice hot meal.

This is not a time to feel guilty about resting, these forty days are as much about your recovery as they are about your new bundle of joy. Remember the saying, '**You cannot pour from an empty vessel.**'

So please let your family and friend's step in and help where they can. Let us listen to the advice from the wise eastern women and be rested, fed and supported. The body needs rest to maximize recovery, this may seem strange with a new baby waking you through the night, but this is all the more reason to except help. Seriously... get as much rest as you can, let others cook and clean for you and try to get as much sleep as you possibly can. If you get a chance to nap, take it, be strict with visitors or let them cuddle your baby so you can get that power nap in.

Plan and create your circle of support, here are a few suggestions.

- Who will be bringing you and your baby home from the hospital?
- Is there someone who can help with cooking/ bring some meals?
- Who can go shopping for you?
- Do you have other children, do you have childcare?
- Do you have a pet who needs looking after, a dog that needs walking?
- Someone who can look after your precious baby so you can take a shower/get some rest?
- Someone who is a listening ear and can make tea?
- Can someone drive you too appointments if your unable to drive because of a C section

Not every new mother has friends or family available to help out, maybe they work or live a distance away. This doesn't mean you have to feel alone, you can still recruit backup, doulas are a great support for a new mum. They can support you from pregnancy, birth and beyond. Different doulas have different packages and sometimes just like friends and family it may just be for that listening ear, popping the kettle on and cuddling baby so you can get some rest.

Doulas are also a great help for any new mum struggling with breast feeding, it is not always easy to breast fed your baby and can leave women feeling very emotional. It

is good to have someone who can help you through this time. Also speak to your midwife and check out any local breast-feeding groups in your area. Always feel you can ask for help and not struggle alone.

Your Postnatal Care Kit

Preparing for birth, you hear a lot about your hospital bag, but nobody really mentions preparing your postnatal care kit. You won't want to be dashing out to the shops for these supplies with your new baby so put these items together yourself towards the end of your pregnancy. (check the below items with your midwife or doctor).

- Ibuprofen
You could be very sore from surgery or tears & stitches, so pain relief on standby is a must have in the cupboard
- Instant ice pack/ medicated cooling pads
These are an added pain relief if you end up having tears or stitches or get haemorrhoids, (however do not use the ice packs directly on skin, (use these wrapped in a cloth or hand towel).
- Donut shaped cushion
Another must have if you are feeling very tender below, making sitting a little more comfortable in those early days.
- Haemorrhoid cream/ Haemorrhoid pads
You may not need these as not every birth result's in haemorrhoids but always good to have them on hand to avoid any additional discomfort.
- Stool softener
It can be difficult having bowel movements for a short time after birth so taking a stool softener can help make this a little easier for you.
- Comfy postnatal underwear
You may have a C section so comfortable knickers that don't rub are really important, again if your tender below feeling comfortable is so important.
- Maxi pads
You will need the thicker maxi pads for the best protection.
- Silicone scar sheets
For those painful C section wounds

- Breast feeding cushion
You will spend a lot of time sitting and feeding your baby whether breast or bottle fed so being comfortable is really important as well as keeping you from over slouching.
- Breast pads
For those leaky moments!
- Nipple balms
To help sooth some nipples from breast feeding
- Bath salts Epsom
To help sooth those tired aching muscles
- Essential oils
Because it is just as important after birth to have those relaxing shoulder or back massages, you're a goddess remember and your tired muscles as well as your mental wellbeing will benefit hugely.
- Lavender room spray
The relaxing scent of lavender will help in making you feel more relaxed in your environment.

Postnatal Care Tips

- Take care of tears & stitches
Manage pain to help you recover naturally from birth, it can be painful to urinate with stitches below so try and keep the area as clean as you can and use medicated cooling pads as well as ibuprofen to relief the stinging.
- Take care of your Caesarean scar
Importantly remember you have had major surgery and you need 'rest' to help aid your recovery. Make sure you have your ibuprofen to hand to help deal with any pain and wear loose, comfortable underwear.
- Get as much sleep as you can
This may seem a hard task with a new baby keeping you awake at night but giving birth is so physically demanding, so for your mental and physical wellbeing please take those naps if you can. Nap when baby does and do not feel guilty about it.
Let family and friends cuddle baby for a while so you can get some rest, you do not need to entertain guests and people love to feel useful.

- **Massage**
This is not indulgent, take advice from the eastern traditions and let your partner or friends give you a gentle shoulder or foot massage. I cannot express enough how important your wellbeing is at this time, having massage can help reduce postnatal depression. Once you are up to leaving the home book in with a therapist for a specialist postnatal massage.
- **Prepare for being emotional**
Baby blues are normal and your hormones will take you up and down, flying high thinking your super woman and then the next a crying mess of emotion. It is like having PMS in major overdrive. So be kind to yourself.
- **Pelvic floor exercises**
You can start your pelvic floor exercises as soon as the first week after delivery depending on whether you had a surgical cut or tear, in that case you may want to wait a little longer so it's not as sore.
- **Breathe better**
We often overlook the power of the breath but learning to breathe 'better' helps to calm the nervous system as well as helping you to reconnect to your core. Find a place to sit, tune in, and listen. Calm the mind and create balance through a few rounds of deep breathing.
- **Keep fuelled with good food**
Pregnancy is nutritionally demanding on your body as all your stores of vitamins leading up to birth are transferred to baby. It's hugely important to replenish those vitamins in your early stages of motherhood. Meal plan prior to your birth, get the freezer stocked with delicious nutrient rich foods to help that recovery and also make your life easier when you return from hospital.
- **Keep hydrated**
Breast feeding can, make you feel hydrated and healing is slowed by dehydration so keep your fluids up. Herbal teas are a warming alternative to plain water and can have added anti-inflammatory benefits.

Breathing Better and Pelvic Health

Rest and The Breath

Rest can be one of the most challenging things for a new mother and yet it is important for your nervous system, so make sure you take some time for you to check in and support your wellbeing.

Mindful Breath - Find a place to sit and calm the mind and tune in to a few rounds of deep breathing. Take the thumb and fourth finger, place them over the bridge of your nose. Gently close off the right nostril as you take a full inhale through the left nostril. At the top of the inhale, take a brief moment to pause, feeling the fullness of the breath. Then close off the left nostril as you exhale through the right nostril, taking a brief pause at the bottom of the exhale. Keeping the left nostril closed, inhale through the right, pause, close off the right nostril and exhale through the left. Continue through 5 more rounds, ending with an exhale through the left nostril.

Breath and Core Connection - Lying on your back, place one hand on your heart and one hand on your belly. Start to become aware of the area around the belly and begin to draw the navel toward the spine on an exhale to feel the connection between your abdominal and back muscles, exhaling for a count of 4 or 5. Try to keep your upper back, shoulders and neck relaxed down and not tensed. Take between 10-15 rounds of breath. Make sure you do a full inhalation and a complete exhale, drawing in around the belly. As well as slowly helping the core to gently reconnect your breath will help calm your mind and your nervous system.

Breath, Core and Pelvic Floor - You can start to connect your pelvic floor to your breath. Begin connecting your 'front muscles', if you imagine you really need to pee but can't get to the toilet, when you tighten and lift the vagina in this way you perform a kegel, a low level re-connection and strengthening exercise which is a great way to reconnect to your pelvic floor in the early days post both. To connect your rear muscles imagine you are standing in a crowded lift and you need to pass wind (but of course you don't want to), the tension you create at your anus combined with lifting up your rectum is also a kegel, but this time contracting the muscle at the rear of your pelvic floor. Bring it together on your next out breath as you feel your tummy muscles being activated and being drawn in, visualise drawing your 'front' and 'back' pelvic muscles in towards each other and gently lifting the entire pelvic floor. In general, for most women the muscles of the front of the pelvic floor are weaker than those at the rear especially after having babies.

Gentle belly breath can help you to reconnect to your core and can help with the healing of any diastasis recti that may have resulted from pregnancy (as long as you are not 'over' expanding the belly).

What is Diastasis Recti?

It is a separation of the abdominal wall usually occurring in the rectus abdominis or the outermost layer of the abdominal wall. The severity of this separation differs in all women and can be measured by your healthcare professional. Most cases, with proper awareness and mindful abdominal techniques, heal on their own, but some may require physical therapy.

Nutrition for Postnatal Recovery

Food really is one of *'the'* most important things to help aid your birth recovery along with adequate rest and breathing well. Preparing and freezing food prior to the birth of your baby is really important to make sure you are fuelling your body correctly in your rehabilitation. It will be all too easy when you are feeling tired and not up to food shopping to grab quick, unhealthy foods that won't fuel your body correctly.

- Try to avoid too many sugary or stodgy foods as these will slow the healing process and if you have had a caesarean the last thing you need is food that can cause bloating that will stretch your tummy. Stodgy food will also make you feel very tired which isn't exactly something you need help with. Nothing really will prepare you for how tired recovering from birth will leave you, whilst coping with a new baby. Pick foods for fuel and nourishment which will be key for recovering well.
- Sugar may give you a temporary boost, but you will soon come crashing down. Sugar is also inflaming for your body and inflammation will reduce the potential for both healing and fat loss.
- Ditch the coffee too or cut down as it increases cortisol and will encourage belly fat.
- It is worth remembering that a good diet won't just benefit YOU...if you breast feed, many of the additives you eat and drink, like sugar and caffeine will also transfer to your milk and then onto your baby. Another thing you need to remember if you are breast feeding is that baby will consume your calories, so you need around 500 extra calories a day to make up for this. Also eat more often, 3 main meals and 3 snacks a day, also drink plenty too.
- Make sure you have a healthy fibre content to avoid getting bloated, if you are tender below from stitches or haemorrhoids you do not want to aggravate things with constipation issues too. Constipation can also have long lasting effects, as potential straining can cause pelvic prolapse. Lots of vegetables instead of bread - organic where possible to keep those bowels healthy.
- A good amount of protein, preferably at every meal as this is vital for tissue recovery. Good fats, those omega fatty acids are also essential for scar healing.
- You will have lost a lot of blood giving birth and for several days after you will be losing blood still, so make sure you are getting a sufficient amount of iron and fill your diet with plenty of vitamins.

Stocking up your fridge and cupboards

- Superfood smoothie powders like cacao, spirulina, chai and seeds.
- Oats, honey, peanut butter.
- Canned fruits, although fresh is better for you these are handy for when fresh is running low and are great for stewing to top porridge.

- Some non-perishing snacks that you can grab on the go like nuts, seeds and rice crackers.
- Warming spices like ginger, cinnamon and turmeric, these are great for helping warm the body and can be added to food and smoothies.

Turmeric - has anti-inflammatory and anti-bacterial benefits and helps improve symptoms of depression.

Cinnamon – can lower blood sugar levels, is loaded with antioxidants as well as having anti-inflammatory properties.

Ginger – can help settle an upset stomach and feelings of nausea, it is also known to be a natural way to relieve pain, it is also anti-inflammatory. It is also said to aid blood flow.

These spices make wonderfully warming herbal teas too and are also a great way to get your water intake up. Ginger and turmeric are a warming blend, combine with honey and warm coconut milk for a nurturing drink.

Stock up on the herbal tea bags too, raspberry leaf particularly is a great postnatal tea as it helps to improve the uterus helping to tone and tighten muscles, it's also a great pregnancy tonic being claimed to help shorten labour. Try using dried raspberry leaves with cinnamon sticks for a delicious combination.

Prepare and freeze

Soups, stews, bone broth,

(see recipe section of the manual for ideas)

Tips:-

- You can later add fish or poultry to soups and broths for an even heartier meal.
- You can also add seeds, sprouts, extra vegies to 'supersize' your soups
- If you don't like the idea of boiling bones yourself for broth you can buy beef or chicken broth. Bone broth helps to promote collagen and helps the body repair so it really should be part of your recovery.

Check out this Bone broth recipe from <http://www.whollychloe.com/blog>

** Stock up also on frozen berries for smoothies and porridge toppings

Other Key Food Items

- Healthy fats like eggs, oily fish, avocados, nut milks
- Fresh fruit and vegetables
- Oatmeal and flaxseed to help milk supply production
- Chose lean protein like chicken or low mercury fish
- Leafy greens like kale and spinach to promote iron
- Low-glycaemic carbohydrates like nuts, sweet potatoes, oats and brown rice, they will provide the body with longer lasting energy.

Souper Soups

Soups to Cook and Freeze



Clear Vegetable Soup'

Chop/prepare all the veggies shown (peas, carrots, onions, potatoes, leeks, spinach) and pop into the saucepan with water and stock and cook until all the veggies have softened.

It's fast, deeply nutritious, a feast for the eyes and add a quality broth/stock and it's also 'gut-healing'.

Here it's topped with some delicious smoked trout but obviously is tasty and amazing on its own. Trout is an 'oily fish' and so contains powerful anti-inflammatory Omega 3 fatty acids.



'Red Soup'

Chop all the veggies shown on the tray (potatoes, onion, carrots and red peppers) and pop into the saucepan with water and stock and cook until all the veggies have softened sufficiently to be blended. I like to add 2 tablespoons of coconut cream for that added luxury.

It's off-the-scale delicious for such simple ingredients, ready in 15 mins the peppers pack a punch in terms of Vitamin C and the carrots are great source of Vitamin A, both Vitamins support connective tissue health. Topped with half an Avocado for a dose of Omega 3 (good and essential fats) and Broccoli Sprouts which are amazing for their Sulphorafane content which amongst other benefits, is highly rated for it's anti-cancer properties...



Green Soup

Chop all the veggies shown on the tray (potatoes, onion, broccoli, watercress) and pop into the saucepan with water and stock and cook until all the veggies have softened sufficiently to be blended.

Add 2 tablespoons of coconut cream for that added luxury.

Broccoli belongs to the cruciferous family which are excellent as supporters of the Liver as one of our major detoxification pathways. Great for helping to balance hormones.



White Soup

Chop all the veggies shown on the tray (cauliflower, onions, potatoes) and pop into the saucepan with water and stock and cook until all the veggies have softened sufficiently to be blended. I like to add 2 tablespoons of coconut cream for that added luxury. Why it rocks? Cruciferous vegetables such as cauliflower contain glucosinolates which support the work of the Liver as a major detoxification pathway and have anti-cancer properties.



Allium 'Army' Soup

Chop all the veggies shown on the tray (leeks, onions, potatoes) and pop into the saucepan with water and stock and cook until all the veggies have softened sufficiently to be hand blended. I like to add 2 tablespoons of coconut cream for that added luxury and then a swirl of white truffle oil!



Mushroom Soup

This soup is hands down the fastest/most nutritious soup on the planet. Quite literally take a punnet of mushrooms (from ordinary button to fancy Shittake and less common varieties) and saute in oil with 1 chopped onion. When everything has softened, add stock, a few dollops of coconut cream to make it 'cream of mushroom' soup if you want, season with salt and pepper! That is it and literally from fridge to bowl in 15 mins flat.

Mushrooms have been found to be powerful antiinflammatories and a source of Vitamin D

Affirmations for a new mother

“ I will take care of myself in order to be a good mother ”

“My body will continue to heal”

“I am rocking this mummy body & I am beautiful”

“I will take time for self-care today”

“I will lean into my partner when I need help”