

The 4th Trimester: Postpartum Care for Moms and Physical Therapy

Attentions MOMS: There is a 4th Trimester for baby AND YOU!

So, you've made it past pregnancy, labor and delivery...Welcome to the other side!

The 4th Trimester refers to that time *after* childbirth. Not only is your baby transitioning from womb to the world, but this is also a transition for you. New moms are encountering MANY changes during the 4th Trimester including physical, emotional, and lifestyle changes. Learning or relearning how to navigate life with a newborn can be a wonderful, yet challenging time, especially when support is needed.

Redefining Postpartum Care

In 2018, The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecologists (ACOG) established new guidelines redefining the postpartum care in the 4th Trimester. These guidelines indicate that women should have their first contact with their OB, by phone or person, three weeks after delivery. Thereafter, a comprehensive postpartum visit should include a full assessment and include screening for: "mood and emotional well-being, infant care and feeding, sexuality, contraception, birth spacing, sleep and fatigue, physical recovery from birth, chronic disease management and health maintenance." This means women can get the treatment and support they need in all aspects of their physical, social and psychological well-being. If needed, this also encourages referrals to other care team providers such as women's health or pelvic health physical therapists, lactation consultants, and other specialists involved in postpartum care. This allows postpartum care to be an ongoing process and not just a single visit back to the doctor.

Physical Therapy in the 4th Trimester

ACOG's statements acknowledge the important role of physical therapy for postpartum moms. A physical therapist (PT) that specializes in women's health and pelvic floor muscle dysfunction can provide you with the expertise to assess your physical function for best return to your day-to-day tasks. Common conditions treated by women's health/pelvic health PT: urinary and/or fecal incontinence, abdominal muscle separation (diastasis recti), pelvic and/or low back pain, scar pain post (whether Cesarean or vaginal birth), sexual pain/dysfunction, and other musculoskeletal impairments that may need attention during postpartum healing. The focus of postpartum rehab should be to help you regain control of your body functions to support physical recovery from pregnancy and childbirth and return safely and effectively to all physical activity or even exercise. Physical therapy should be a standard of care in the postpartum journey to improve a woman's quality of life.

You Deserve Quality Care

Mommas, if you're in your 4th trimester, talk to your health care provider about getting the most optimal care for your postpartum recovery. You are worth it!

