



KUSUMA@SOLDOULA.COM - 250-886-9357 - FB:SOLDOULASERVICES



Self Care Beyond Birth

The Fourth Trimester/Lay In Period

- In many countries and cultures around the world, birth customs are set up to take care of the mother during her fourth trimester/lay-in period.
- During this time women are generally isolated from the rest of the community but the mother is pampered with special herbs and oils and foods that are considered especially healing for the mother. The mother is not expected to care for others or perform any of her regular responsibilities. This usually lasts between 8 and 40 days.
- Living in North America, we need to find ways to embody these customs and their wisdom, in order to create nourishing and healing environments for mothers.

The Importance of Self Care

- In order to take care of others, you must put your oxygen mask on first
- Identify the ways in which you feel nourished, then make time for that
- Self care is also about ensuring that you eat when you're hungry, drink when you're thirsty, sleep when you can, get out to see other humans etc. And putting the routines in place to ensure that this is possible.
- Solutions: Cut up healthy snacks that are easy to grab (or ask your partner, friend, parent or postpartum doula to prepare some), Cook way more than you can eat in one meal so that you always have leftovers, Cook Millet, Quinoa, Buckwheat or Rice in large amounts so that you can grab it and throw some veg on quickly, Eat lots of healthy fats (coconut, olive) and proteins (beans, nuts, meat) as well as complex carbohydrates (whole grains) as these will keep you going, Always have water nearby when you

sit down to breastfeed, and make it your mission to finish the glass by the time the baby finishes feeding, make a large jug of herbal iced tea to drink from throughout the day.

- Mothers who care for themselves have a reduced risk of postpartum depression and a greater sense of empowerment and control over their emotional and physical health, as well as their situation after birth.

Hormones and Postpartum Depression

- In a study looking at cultural comparisons of women experiencing postpartum depression; rituals: such as the lay-in period, the offering of certain herbs, foods and medicines, as well as help from family and friends, were all determinants in whether a mother succumbed to PPD.
- Hormones significantly influence postpartum Depression. When pregnant, the placenta secretes oxytocin (the love and bonding hormone) and Corticotrophin Releasing Hormone - CRH (the stress fighting hormone.)
- The placenta releases a large amount of CRH prior to birth (speculated that this is to help mom get through the stress of the labour and delivery), but, this rise in CRH causes the hypothalamus (which normally regulates the release of this hormone) to go on strike and it takes a while for the Hypothalamus to get the signal that it needs to make more CRH.
- Lack of CRH – Linked to Depression
- Consuming the placenta will help to stabilize CRH levels to give the hypothalamus time to get back to work. Placenta consumption can also lead to: increased milk supply, replenishing of depleted iron, increased energy, less bleeding postnatally, and an easier time adapting to the postpartum period with an elevated mood.

How Partners Can Help

- Asking your partner for help is a way to empower them and create time for them to connect with their child as well.
- Ask mom “How can I help” or “What can I do to help?”
- Challenge gender norms and step in to recognize your partner’s tendency to want to do everything by taking on some of that burden
- Give mom one hour every day to do her own thing, take a shower, read a book, go shopping, do some yoga; you will be giving her an incredible gift.
- Check to see that she’s eating, drinking and sleeping ok. Help prepare food, keep water or iced herbal tea near her at all times.

- Offer to take the night shift sometimes, even if it means mom pumping ahead so that you can feed the baby
- Try to anticipate what she might do if she gets out of bed and sees a messy kitchen, or feels hungry, or a full laundry basket and try to respond to those things before she gets there.

Setting Up Support

- Identify the kind of help that you anticipate needing! Thinking ahead to what you may need will help you plan for what could come up.
- It's essential to put support systems in place prior to giving birth. Ask friends if they can come over once a week and spend time with you, help with the baby and assist with making food.
- If you don't have a lot of family or community in the area, consider hiring a postpartum doula to give lactation support, and help with mild house cleaning, emotional support, child care, food prep and other practical considerations.
- Create food prior to the birth that you can freeze or preserve in other ways
- Let your network know what you need and ask for these things at your baby shower (ie. each friend bakes a casserole, they can buy you a massage to use after the baby is born, they can all split to get you a Birth Doula and/or Postpartum Doula.)
- Write a list of people whom you can call when you need to talk, cry, vent, or ask for help. It may be hard to remember who those people are if you're feeling overwhelmed and alone.

Resources in the Community and Beyond

- Young Parent Support Network
(Centre in Victoria supporting young parent families)
<http://www.ypsn.ca>
- Single Parent Resource Centre
(Offering classes, support, mentoring and free food/clothes)
<http://www.singleparentvictoria.ca>
- Victoria Best Babies Program
(Free prenatal & Postnatal mom & baby groups)
<http://www.fernwoodnrg.ca/fernwood-nrg-programs/family-programs/best-babies/>

- Public Health Breast Feeding Support
(Breastfeeding support)
http://www.viha.ca/children/baby_and_you/resources/community_resources
- Placenta Encapsulation
(Sarah Kristiansand)
<http://www.placentials.com>
- Mothering Touch
(Prenatal & Postnatal mom & baby groups)
<http://www.motheringtouch.ca>
- Pacific Post Partum Support Society
(Assistance with postpartum depression)
<http://www.postpartum.org>
- Anxiety BC – For Mothers
(Assistance for mothers experiencing anxiety)
<http://www.anxietybc.com/parents/new-moms>
- Victoria La Leche League
(Breastfeeding support – Lactation Consultants)
<http://www.lllc.ca>
- Vancouver Island Women’s Clinic
(Support for women during and after birth)
<http://www.viwomensclinic.ca>
- Seeds of Life Doula Services - Victoria
(Prenatal, Birth and Postpartum Doula Support)
<http://www.soldoula.com>
- Mama on the Mend
(Great web resource for new families)
<http://www.mamaonthemend.com>
- After the Baby’s Birth – A woman’s Way to Wellness
(Book about natural ways to care for your mind and body after birth)
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