

# Healing Motherhood

Your guide to  
postpartum planning

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# Meet Doula Naomi



I'm a wife and mother to 3 small children (2, 3 & 4!) and postpartum doula!

After my own postpartum experiences, I learned the importance of planning and preparing. Postpartum is one of the most monumental transitions you'll ever experience, unfortunately it took me 3 kids to realize this. I figured everything would just fall into place the way social media told me it would and when it didn't, I felt as if I didn't deserve help and support. This was largely based on the romanticized version of motherhood I saw regularly and believed all the parental bliss myths which also lead to feelings of failure and disappointment. How we experience our early postpartum days can set the tone for our entire parenthood.

You deserve a restful, nurtured, supported postpartum adjustment. So, I've taken what I wish I knew and put it together in this 8 page postpartum planning guide for you!



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# Welcome to Postpartum Planning!

This guide is best suited for first time parents, however second (or more) time parents would still find the benefits of completing it. This guide was created to help plan for a postpartum where you feel capable, empowered, and prepared. Once completed you should have a good understanding of what postpartum life will look like. If you are still have questions or are seeking more information and support, consider Healing Motherhood, a Postpartum Planning session. This session is 3 hours and includes a complete workbook designed by me and discussions that covers all things postpartum.

The purpose of this guide is to help navigate the first 6-8 weeks, although keeping it on hand for the first year would be beneficial as a postpartum mood and anxiety disorder can occur anytime in the first postpartum year.

Your postpartum plan can be as detailed as you like, or as flexible as you would like. Whether you are firm in your choices or are more “go with the flow”, I do highly recommend taking the time to think bc about what postpartum life will look like and how to prepare for it.

As you make your way through this guide, if you’re struggling to answer some questions, I strongly recommend looking into professional postpartum support, such as doula care.

Postpartum isn’t the end. Too often it is seen as the ending. The end of pregnancy, the end of life as you knew it, the end of sleep, the end of who you were. It’s just the end.

Postpartum is a beautiful beginning of a tremendous transition.

**So let’s get started!**

# What to Expect in the First 6 Weeks

Here are some terms and what you may experience early postpartum. Everyone's postpartum is different and may vary considerably with type of delivery, length of labour, whether or not they are breastfeeding. This is not a complete list as recovery will vary based on some of the above factors. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to ask.

**Vaginal bleeding and discharge:** Whether you had a vaginal delivery or cesarean birth, you will experience vaginal bleeding, this is also known as lochia. It can last up to 6 weeks, or beyond depending on delivery experience, though anything passed 6 weeks should be discussed with your health care provider. Your primary care provider will discuss signs and symptoms to watch for, such as clot size and amount to expect. If they do not mention it, be sure to ask.

**Cesarean incision or vaginal tear care:** You may have stitches or staples. Care should be discussed with your care provider as well as signs and symptoms of infection.

**Hemorrhoids:** Many experience hemorrhoids from the pushing stage of labour.

**Sweats:** As your hormones shift, you may experience the sweats, many experience them at night. It will subside as your hormones level out. If a feeling of unwell accompanies the sweats be sure to consult with your primary care provider to be assessed for infection.

**Afterpains:** Pains in the abdomen as the uterus contracts back to size. You may notice it most during or after breastfeeding. If pains worsen be sure to consult with your primary care provider.

**Gas pains:** If you had a cesarean, you may experience gas pains that can last for a couple weeks.

**Baby bonding:** For some it happens immediately, for other it takes some time. As your Postpartum Doula, I will help create time and space for you and your baby to continue to bond.

**Sore nipples:** If you are breastfeeding you may experience sore or cracked nipples.

**Engorged breasts:** You may experience engorgement as our milk comes in typically around days 2-4. If you are not breastfeeding, engorgement may still occur and there are methods to stop production.

**Blocked milk ducts:** May happen if the breasts aren't being fully drained during feeds. You may feel a lump and some pain. Any fever or feelings of unwell and be sure to contact your healthcare provider to be assessed for mastitis, which is a serious infection that can occur.

**Swelling:** Many experience some swelling post-delivery often as a result of IV fluids. It can last for a few days. Loose shoes and clothing are recommended.

**Hormone drop and baby blues:** Your hormones begin to drop immediately after delivery. Your hormones, estrogen, and progesterone, will drop from the highest they've ever been to the lowest as your body begins to return to a pre-pregnancy state. This shift can cause sudden changes in mood and contributes to baby blues. Find more on baby blues on p. 13 "Emotional Recovery".

**Sore back:** You may experience back ache from labouring or if you received the epidural.

# Food

Postpartum is not the time to diet. Focus on nutrient dense foods for energy and healing.  
Remember to stay hydrated!

Do you hope to...

- Have meals and snacks made and frozen for convenience?
- Order in \_\_\_\_ times a week?
- Have easy to grab snacks and snacks that can be eaten with one hand?
- Organize a meal train before birth?

# Visitors

Saying “No” and setting boundaries is an important part of parenthood.

Do not feel badly about setting boundaries regarding visitors. These boundaries are meant to protect you and baby physically and mentally.

You can absolutely say “no visitors” at any point.

Do not feel the need to entertain visitors as this is your time to rest.

## **Will you allow visitors...**

- To visit in hospital?
- Drop in unannounced?
- Schedule visiting times?

## **Consider requesting that visitors...**

- Make known if they or someone in their home is ill.
- Not expect to be entertained or fed while visiting.
- Wash hands and respect other requests from the mother such as “no kissing”.
- Bring food, snacks, or any other supplies the family may need at this time.

Visits will be limited to \_\_\_\_ minutes/hours.

\*I recommend no more than 45 minutes and to plan around feeds if possible so as to not disrupt your bonding time with baby.

# Taking Care of Baby

Infant sleep will always be a hot topic. There is advice every where about infant sleep. Some sleep better than others, some need more comfort and security throughout the night. Both are normal.

**Your worth as a mother is not determined by how your baby sleeps.**

## **Where will baby sleep?**

- Bassinet
  - Crib
  - Co-sleep
- Room share or will baby go into their own room at birth?

## **Feeding**

How will baby be fed?

- Breastfed
- Bottle fed
- Combination fed

## **Breastfeeding**

what supports do you have?

- Lactation Consultant
- Postpartum Doula
- Local breastfeeding groups
- Supportive partner

## **Ways partners can support breastfeeding:**

- Bring baby to be fed
- Help burp or change diapers after a feeding
- Bring water or snacks while mom nurses
- Tell mom what a great job she is doing

Breastfeeding is natural, however very rarely comes naturally. It is a learning process between mother and infant. Sometimes this process can be a lot of hard work and can be exhausting.

A good indicator of if a breastfed baby is receiving enough is counting wet and dirty diapers.

At first, you want to see at least 1 wet diaper per day of life, so day 1 at least 1 wet diaper, day 2 at least 2 wet diapers, and so on. After 5 days you want at least 6 wet diapers and at least 1 bowel movement.

Whether you breastfeed for a week or a year, the weaning process can bring about hormonal shifts and big emotions. Weaning depression is real and you should contact your care provider if you have concerns.

Know that if you're breastfeeding, you have a legal right to feed your baby in any public space.

## **Bottle feeding**

what supports do you have?

Will baby receive expressed breast milk or formula?

**Ways partners can support bottle feeding:**

- Help prepare and sterilize bottles
- Help with feedings
- Care for baby while mom pumps
- Tell mom what a great job she is doing

**Combination feeding** is just as it sounds – a combination of both breastfeeding and bottle feeding.

Often babies will cry for a period of time during the day, often around the same time every day. This is known as witching hour or purple crying. Some cry more, some cry less, both are normal. Any concerns should be addressed with your care provider.

Sometimes bonding with baby happens during pregnancy, sometimes at birth and sometimes days, weeks, months later. All are normal. Some activities that support bonding are:

- Skin to skin
- Bathing
- Singing
- Infant massage

If you have concerns, reach out to your health care provider or a therapist with a focus on postpartum experiences.

## **Your Recovery**

**Physical Recovery**

Have you gathered the postpartum healing essentials?

Who do you have to support you during recovery?

**Sleep**

Sleep will not likely be 8 hours overnight anymore. You will need to look at total sleep over the course of 24 hours. Lack of sleep has long been associated with postpartum mood and anxiety disorders. “Sleep when baby sleeps” is annoying but true. If you are unable to sleep, try to at least rest while baby naps. Chores can wait.

How will you prioritize sleep?

Most birthers get the “ok” from their healthcare provider to resume physical activities by 6 weeks postpartum, however this will vary depending on type of birth. 100% of gestational carriers experience some level of diastasis recti by 35 weeks pregnant. However common it may be, does not mean it is your new normal. I highly recommend Pelvic Floor Physio with a trained physiotherapist.



Hair loss is a common experience among postpartum persons. Typically starting around 3-5 months postpartum and can last up to a year. If the loss seems greater than expected, contact your health care provider.

### **Emotional Recovery**

80% of birthing persons experience the Baby Blues. Baby blues are not considered a diagnosis. Usually they start around 2-4 days postpartum. They can last from a couple days to 2 weeks. Anything beyond 2 weeks should be discussed with your health care provider.

1 in 5 birthing persons will experience a postpartum mood and anxiety disorder and 1 in 10 partners.

Familiarize yourself with the risk factors for postpartum mood and anxiety disorders. Having any risk factors does not mean that you will experience a mood disorder, but it should be discussed with your supports and care provider.

Also get to know the 6 postpartum mood and anxiety disorders and the symptoms for each:

- Postpartum Depression
- Postpartum Anxiety
- Postpartum OCD
- Postpartum Psychosis
- Postpartum PTSD
- Postpartum Bipolar Disorder

Do you know where and who you can ask for help if any of these mood disorders present?

Who can help in your emotional recovery?

If you have experienced the loss of a parent(s), be prepared for emotions to surface in your parenting experience. Connecting with other parentless parents can help validate your feelings.

### **Processing Your Birth Story**

Birth is unpredictable and sometimes it's nothing like we planned. Take the time to process your birth story. 1 in 3 will describe some aspect of their birth as traumatic and its estimated that 9% develop PTSD. If you feel this applies to you, know there are mental health professionals trained in postpartum and trauma who can aid with healing after a traumatic birth.

Some ways to help the birth story process

- Write out your birth story
- Draw, paint, photos
- Tell your birth story to a trusted listener\*
- Professional support, such as a birth trauma counsellor

\*A trusted listener is someone who can listen with empathy and without judgement. Someone you feel you can tell the story to without changing it to fit their comfort level. This may not be a person who also attended the birth.



# **Roles and Responsibilities**

Will you have any supports at home after baby?

Will your partner or support be taking off time after baby?

If so, how much?

If they cannot take off any time, consider hiring postpartum support. Remember that how you experience the first 6 weeks can make a difference in how you experience your postpartum year.

Make a list of household tasks and duties and rank them from first priority to last priority and who will handle each task and how often they need to be done. You can adjust this list after baby is born, but it will be helpful to have a starting point.

## **Self Care and Relationship Care**

### **Self care**

As a new parent it can be hard to prioritize yourself. For you and your partner. It is important that you both practice self care.

How are some ways you can practice self care?

How many times a week can you do these things?

Who can watch the baby and/or older siblings so you can take care of yourself?

### **Relationship Care**

#### **Intimate Partner Relationship**

As new parents it can be hard to prioritize your relationship. How can you stay connected to your partner during this time?

#### **Discuss with each other:**

- What I need as a new parent...
- My biggest concerns about being a parent...
- When I want to feel connected and intimate with my partner, but they are tired, I feel...
- When I do not want to feel intimate, but they do, I feel...

#### **A note on the return of your sex life**

Many receive the “ok” from their healthcare providers to resume sexual activity after 6 weeks. This is their medical ok that you are physically able. It does not mean that you will feel ready at 6 weeks and you may decide to wait longer, this is ok and normal. Open, empathetic communication is important for both of you.

#### **Points to discuss**

- The 6-week recovery period
- If you do not feel physically or emotionally ready after 6 weeks
- Ways to remain intimate without intercourse
- Open discussion about needs and expectations
- Open discussion about how you feel about your postpartum body

# Postpartum Recovery Essentials

**Peri bottle.** If you have multiple bathrooms, I recommend having one in every bathroom. If you are delivering by cesarean, you will not need a peri bottle.

**Pads or Adult Diapers.** You will need a variety of sizes. The first week you may need large overnight pads, this is when many women prefer adult diapers. You will slowly be able to move into smaller sizes as the bleeding tapers off. No tampons or menstrual cups.

**Stool softener.** The first poop can be terrifying, so let us make it a little easier. Remember all medications should be discussed with your care provider.

**Pain Management.** Your care provider will be able to suggest the best post birth pain management for you. Most are over the counter and you will be able to pick up before birth. You may also be prescribed something additional from your care provider. Use any medication, prescribed or over the counter, as directed by your doctor or pharmacist.

**Breast pads.** If you plan to breastfeed you will likely need breast pads especially in the first few months, but you may need them the entire duration of your breastfeeding journey. If you are not breastfeeding, you may need them if your milk still comes in after birth until it dries up.

**Nipple Cream.** If you plan to breastfeed. There are different varieties. There is 100% lanolin, mixtures, or just plain coconut oil.

**Epsom salts.** Sitz baths or short soaks in the bath post-vaginal delivery can help healing and soothe the discomfort of any stitches. You can also add them to your peri bottle for extra relief. Baths and showering should be done as directed by your health care provider.

**Postpartum Clothing.** Loose pajama pants, sweatpants, or even maternity pants, easy button-down tops for easy skin-to-skin and breastfeeding, cotton underwear, and nursing bras (if planning on breastfeeding).

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