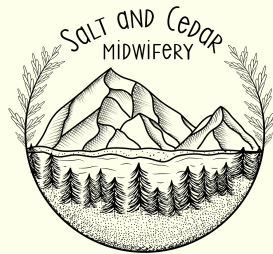

POSTPARTUM

PREP & REFLECTION



WORKBOOK

Table of contents

Intro: So, you're having a baby	1
Mind, body, spirit	2
Postpartum attachment	3
Support tips: Logistics	4
Your other children	7
Partners	8
Sexuality	9
Intimacy Tidbits	12
Conclusion: You've got this	13

So, you're having a baby.

You'll find that the themes of this workbook are:

- Communication
- Listening to your body
- Communication
- Listen to your intuition
- You're doing awesome
- Seek connection
- Rally the troops, or identify who they may be
- Question what you've been told is normal
- Nourish your mind, body, & spirit
- You are going to be the BEST parent for your baby

The postpartum period is known as the first 6 weeks after delivering your baby. During this time, your body, mind, and spirit are healing and transitioning. Of course, being the humans we are, you'll continue to transition AFTER a 6 week period, too.

Complete this workbook before baby is born, and use it for support and reassurance.

Mind, body, spirit

PHYSICALLY: Your uterus is returning to pre-pregnancy size (it'll hang out as high as your belly button for the first few days), pregnancy hormones are leaving and breastfeeding hormones are taking their place, blood supply is shifting (remember, it increased by 40% during pregnancy!), and your uterus is shedding its lining and healing a placental site. Your bleeding is the heaviest in the first 24 hours. After that, it should decrease day by day, and eventually turn pink, brown, and a clear/yellowish color. IF your bleeding increases or appears red when it had previously been brown (for example), it most likely means you are doing too much! Doing too much can be walking around the block, walking upstairs too often, shopping and pushing a cart, etc.

Below are possible physical experiences you MAY have:

- Vaginal and/or vulvar swelling and bruising
- Healing of a perineal, vaginal, and/or vulvar tear, and stinging when you urinate
- Constipation
- Hemorrhoids
- Possible swollen bladder in first 24 hours postpartum
- Uterine cramps, particularly when baby is breastfeeding
- Body soreness and aching
- Excessive sweating

EMOTIONALLY: As your baby enters the outside world and is no longer in the womb, a slew of emotional changes are bound to occur. Remember: whatever you may or may not be feeling is perfectly **normal**. Take time during the prenatal period to reflect on your fears and desires, get in touch with your emotional needs, and practice asking for help to aid you in the postpartum period.

Below are possible emotional experiences you MAY have:

- | | | |
|---------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| • Elation, joy, happiness | • Tears | • Faced with immortality |
| • Love | • Postpartum blues | • Primal feelings |
| • Relief | • Vulnerability | • Enhanced connection to your beliefs |
| • Irritability, agitation | • Mixed feelings toward partner and/or baby | • Disconnection |
| • Indifference | | • Hope |

SPIRITUALLY: Becoming a parent for the first time or adding to your existing family both cause a shift in your day-to-day roles. You may feel connected to other birthing people or mammals in a new way. You are encouraged to form a support system of trusted individuals to help you through this spiritual journey. Explore writing or being creative in a way that speaks to you, maybe through singing or painting. These creative outlets may help you process the childbearing experience.

Postpartum Attachment

What can I do in the prenatal period to encourage healthy attachment to baby?

- You're encouraged to explore and discuss mental health issues or insecure attachments that may be present in your life.
- Reflect on your perceptions of conception, childbearing, the postpartum period, breastfeeding and the partner and other family member's roles in welcoming the newborn.
- Explore self-care measures
- Establish a support group of friends and family

What can I do in the *immediate postpartum* to encourage healthy attachment?

- Process information shared by your midwife or doctor about the birth or necessary interventions
- Skin-to-skin contact
- Initiate breastfeeding
- Kiss, cuddle and talk to your baby
- When possible, ensure baby is near you

What can I do in the postpartum period to encourage healthy attachment?

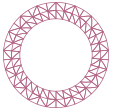
- Continue to receive and process information from your care provider
- Continue to kiss, cuddle and talk to your baby
- Call on your support system. For example, you may call on someone to care for your other children while you spend time with baby.
- Discuss postpartum emotional norms and your current feelings
- Explore your feelings creatively, like through writing, drawing or singing
- Consider a postpartum doula

Remember that attachment and bonding are a process, a journey. You may feel a certain way one day, and another the next day.

If you are concerned that you are experiencing postpartum depression, utilize your care provider for resources and additional help. If you feel you may hurt yourself or others, including your baby, seek immediate help by calling 911.

Postpartum support tips: logistics

GUESS WHAT?! You should lay low for at least 2 weeks. I mean **really** low. Like not leaving the house low. Not walking around your neighborhood. And definitely not going to Costco. People often say, "I wanted to help them after the baby was born, but I didn't know what to do." Well, tell them!

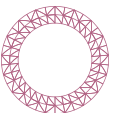


List at least 5 people you can call on.

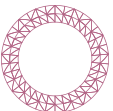
These are people who can help you in-person, or give support over the phone.

ONE STEP FURTHER...

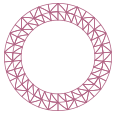
What conversations can you hold with these people prenatally to establish expectations? Even loose expectations. "Hey, I don't know how I'm going to feel or exactly what I'll need. Can I call you when I'm confused and what are you available for?"



Snacks: Before baby is born, make a list of healthy snack ideas. A partner, friends, or family can grab them while out. Drinks like Recharge and nettle tea are nourishing for pregnancy and postpartum. **5 snack ideas:**

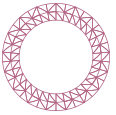


Freezer meals: For a nontraditional take on a baby shower, have a gathering during pregnancy for people to help make freezer meals. Everyone can pitch in with a few ingredients. **5 meal ideas:**



Meal train: Have the page prepared and ready to launch before baby is born, and post it afterward. Have it last at least a month after baby is born. Send out a group e-mail and post on Facebook with the link. Your parents are in town and helping for the first week? Have it start after they leave. You choose which dates are available, what time you want people to come, include any food preferences, and can make a note such as, "We can't wait for you to visit us! Please wash your hands before touching baby, and limit your stay to 15 minutes." www.mealtrain.com (there are others, I just recommend this one commonly).

Brainstorm who you would include on the list, or how you'd ask people to participate:

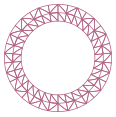


ASK your care provider about what to expect physically and emotionally postpartum. We spend a huge amount of time planning for the birth. I commonly hear, "Planning for postpartum felt like SO much to take in on top of planning for the birth, so I didn't think of it until after baby was born" and "I didn't know I'd be so SORE!"

You know those weeks when your care provider asks "Do you have any questions?" and you look around the room like maybe one will pop out at you, but really you totally forgot all questions?

Just think, "POSTPARTUM!" Ask him/her to talk through what to expect the first few weeks, and/or other recommended resources for you to get that information. (Check out the "books" recommendation at the end of this workbook for my faves.)

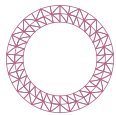
Do any questions or curiosities immediately come to mind?



Write a reminder list for the fridge.

Like, know that you'll need to keep your supplements in one area of the kitchen or you'll forget to take them. Have sanitary pads at arm's reach in your bathroom. DRINK WATER.

What type of "postpartum reminders" will you tape to your fridge, so that your partner or other people at your house helping you can easily find a reference for something to do? (more examples: change out your sheets for a lil' refresher, make a pot of tea, take your younger child for a walk, etc.)



If you plan to breastfeed, identify helpers. If you plan to feed your baby through another lovely means, also identify people, groups, and other helpers.

Contact info for 2 lactation consultants (IBCLC's) who do home visits:
(hint: In Kltsap, Katie Dunning and Melissa Bonghi)

What in-person or online groups are in my area for feeding support? Can I attend or join prenatally? (DO IT!) (Hint: LLL and Nurturing Expressions)

Identify 3 other helpers. These may be friends, chiropractors, craniosacral therapists, etc.

If you don't do any of these things, are you screwed and this whole parenting thing is shot? NO.

If you do at least one of these things, will it add a certain level of support to your experience?
MOST LIKELY, YES.

Postpartum & other children

You've got other children at home.

Will they like the baby? Will you have enough time or energy to give to them? Can you handle it (yes)? All sorts of unknowns!

Keep in mind that **bonding and connection** are part of a JOURNEY: for your children and the new baby, and also for yourself, your partner and the baby. One day your kids may be extremely gentle and loving to baby, the next they may throw things: tantrums and toys.

Time spent with your other children:

No, you probably won't be able to muster as much enthusiasm immediately postpartum about the new lego truck that your kid just made. It's okay. Your love is still there. You are being a wonderful parent by caring for this new baby. You may not be as focused on the other children for some time. Sit with whatever feelings this brings up - maybe guilt, perhaps doubt. **Talk about this with people. You're not alone.**

Tip: When you feel ready, arrange an hour or so when you can spend uninterrupted time with your other child/children. If breastfeeding, after a feeding, hand baby off to another person and step into the backyard or build a lego truck.

New routines and special tasks:

Your children can feel empowered to help care for baby. Maybe one loves to grab diapers for you, another gets in the habit of kissing baby's head before bed. New routines CAN be made with baby here, and baby included.

Postpartum & Partners

Maybe you have a partner, multiple partners, or no partners.

Please note that with some of these points, assumptions are made about what type of partner you have (one committed partner), where that person lives (with you), and how much support they are able to offer. Take what helps you, leave what doesn't.

Partners generally want to help you, baby, and themselves thrive postpartum.

It's a vulnerable time for them, too. They don't want to say or do something "wrong" that may cause you harm. They're figuring out their new role alongside you.

Hold discussions prenatally about how your partner can best be of service to the whole family.

You've been carrying and growing the baby, you will most likely be feeding the baby yourself for a while, and many partners feel like they "aren't doing anything to help."

This is why it's important to have these discussions before baby is born, framing it in a way that by helping you and the family, they ARE helping the baby too.

Tips for partners (addressed to the partners):

- **Spend time with and care for the other children.** Take them out of the house from time to time. Your partner may feel bad about not spending as much time with the other children as usual. Do not add to this guilt.
- **FOOD.** Cook meals. Prepare snacks. FEED YOUR PARTNER.
- **LIQUIDS.** Bring water, tea, juice, any liquids to your partner (ideally clear, un-carbonated liquids. So, water). Make sure they always have a liquid nearby.
- **LISTEN.** Tell your partner they're doing an amazing job. Don't try to fix anything. If your partner feels like there's a problem, definitely ask if you can help with the plan of action (ie: calling a care provider, buying Vitamin C, arranging pillows to better support breastfeeding). *But first, listen.*
- **YOU MAY BE THE FIRST PERSON WHO NOTICES A POSTPARTUM MOOD DISORDER.** Visit www.postpartum.net and click "learn more" if you're concerned and wondering about symptoms.
- **TOUCH.** Shoulder massages! . If your partner is breastfeeding, tension is commonly held in the shoulders and neck. Even placing your hand gently on a shoulder can be a reminder to release tension there.
- You're doing the best you can. Thank you so much.

Postpartum & Sexuality

How might I feel about sexuality?

Possible feelings include excitement, shame, guilt, apprehension, indifference, nervousness, eagerness, empowerment and desire. A slew of feelings are normal! Explore how you feel about your body, your role as an individual, parent and partner.

What are possible interferences to sexual activity?

Fatigue and the presence of a newborn are common responses. If during intimacy you are interrupted, don't worry. Simply tend to what needs to be done and realize that you can always try again at another time. And remember: any amount of intimacy can be fun. Also, you are encouraged to set time aside to be intimate, including having a family member or friend watch the newborn and other children if applicable. Many "interferences" are emotional, too. Like feeling needed by a baby 24/7, and then the idea of sex may sound overwhelming, like you're needed, instead of rejuvenating and a connecting point.

What if it hurts?

First off, remember that penetrative sex is not the end all be all of sex. Show different forms of affection, like handholding, kissing, and caressing. Feel free to gradually ease into penetrative sex if this is what you want, and this may take many intimate encounters. If you desire penetrative sex and fear pain, research different lubrications (coconut oil even works! Just not WITH a condom). Remember, sex shouldn't hurt (okay, so sex on day 3 postpartum would most likely be tender...). IF sex hurts and you want to access resources, consider seeing a pelvic floor therapist (PT). We are all different - there are a variety of reasons why sex may hurt, so a PT may not be the best resource for you. Bottom line: There are options for help to explore if sex is painful.

How can I work toward becoming ready for sexual activity?

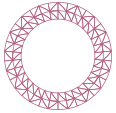
- You are encouraged to address any mood disorders such as depression, anxiety or bipolar disorder.
- Explore ways to combat postpartum fatigue, such as eating a healthy diet, staying hydrated, mild exercise, napping, and asking for assistance when needed.
- Reflect on your relationship with your partner. Be open with your partner about needs and fears. Feel free to hold discussions with your midwife or doctor.
- Discuss family planning methods. If pregnancy spacing is of concern to you, having a contraceptive or family planning method in place may help ease that worry.
- Explore your body image. Revel in your postpartum body! (not to say that's automatically super easy)
- If you take measures included here, give yourself time, engage in open conversations, and still feel uncomfortable with sexuality in a way that debilitates you, contemplate counseling, seeing an OBGYN, and/or a PT.

Sexuality reflection

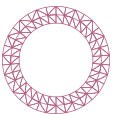
Let's pause for a second. No two people completing this workbook will have the same answers to the questions below. Let it be known that YOUR sexual expression, activity, and identity is YOURS. Our perspectives and "norms" can be impacted by societal "norms", religion, community small and large, our personal history, trauma, and the habits we have created (or feel others have created for us) over our lifespan.

People will tell you when, how, why, with whom, and where to have sex. And you may feel that if you don't follow the rules, there's something wrong with you. Guess what? YOU CREATE THE RULES YOURSELF! There is nothing WRONG with you, and no change needs to be made unless you say there's something you want to change.

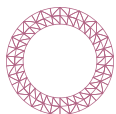
In these questions, the words activity, expression, intimacy, and identity are all used in relation to sexuality. Take the questions as you will and apply it to you.



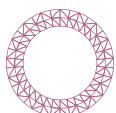
What has your sexual expression/activity looked like recently?



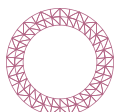
What feelings do you have about what your sexual expression looks like lately?
(ie: are you at peace? frustrated? apathetic?)



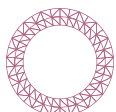
What do YOU value about sexual activity? What do you hope to feel (if anything), physically and emotionally?



If you have a partner, what does s/he value about sexual activity?



List **3 ideas** for making these values a reality. (ie: If you want to feel *creative*, how would that look? If you want to feel *wanted*, how does it look?)



Do any conversations need to be had with your partner? *Use your answers for how you want to feel after a sexual experience to help guide you.*

Intimacy tidbits

NAKED TIME

Spend time together naked. It may be in bed before sleeping, even just for a couple intentional minutes. Enter with the expectation that NO sexual activity is expected. This can offer freedom, like you're free to be in each other's presence in an intimate way, maybe kissing and touching, with no "normative sex" expectation.

INITIATION DISCUSSION

Identify the person in the relationship who does not initiate sexual activity as much as the other. Maybe it's you, maybe it's your partner. Agree that that person only will initiate for a predetermined amount of time. Perhaps sex is initiated... never. Or perhaps every other day. This expectation opens space for intimate freedom, where you or your partner can feel empowered to initiate, and also empowered in the fact that things will not "move forward" without the permission of that person.

Oftentimes people say they just want to kiss, or touch, or HUG, without the expectation that it's always going to turn into penetrative sex. The hope is that discussion around initiation and expectations can be more freeing than hindering.

LIBIDO

It's normal for our libidos to be shifting all the time, particularly postpartum. It's up to you to approach your libido with curiosity, and contemplate whether or not you'd want any changes to be made. You are a complex person and there often isn't one answer for why a libido may be "low", for example (again, you call the shots with what this even means).

Visit this blog post by MD and midwife Aviva Romm to reflect on your libido and ways to reboot your sex drive. avivaromm.com/is-your-libido-low/

You've got this!

The end goal of postpartum preparation is not to have all the answers figured out, inscribed in stone, and placed on your mantle as the foolproof rules of postpartum.

Living the process and practicing, that's the goal.

There is no "end" goal. Practice reflecting on what you need and asking for it. Practice listening to the voice inside of you that says "I know what I want to do here, I know the next step on the path. And if I don't know, who do I contact for assistance?" It's these skills that will help you thrive postpartum.

What we're missing here:

This workbook does not include some crucial postpartum bits. Baby feeding, including breastfeeding, being a main one. "Ina May's Guide to Breastfeeding" and "The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding" are helpful books. Reach out to lactation consultants (IBCLC). If delivering at a hospital, there's typically one on staff. SEEK OUT ANOTHER. Have one come to your home. Some IBCLC's charge by the hour, offer packages, or are donation-based. Contact the IBCLC *before* you deliver to have yourself on their radar.

All of the points in this workbook are intertwined. Are you feeling stressed and anxious? Is it related to feeding your baby, time with your partner, time with the kids, relationship to yourself?

What can add to your holistic view of self so you can better identify how emotions are connected to specific triggers, external and internal events?

...what an adventure! Live the process!