

Postnatal Planning

WHY A POSTNATAL PLAN?

In many cultures the postnatal period is a time for rest, recovery and adapting to parenthood. During this time, family and friends gather together to support and care for new parents.

Research has found that in cultures where rituals and customs are integral to the postnatal period, new mothers are:

- at a reduced risk of developing postnatal depression
- more likely to establish and continue breastfeeding
- more confident in their role as a mother and in caring for their baby

Many new parents hope to carry on as normal and to slot baby into their lives, however the lack of emphasis and knowledge around rest, nourishment, and emotional support for new parents can impact their mental and physical health.

These days we have to find our own 'village' as it is no longer in many cases readily available to us. We might find that we don't live near grandparents, that partners cannot easily get leave, or that we aren't used to seeing others around us breastfeed or change nappies. There may also be unexpected complications at birth which may lead to more support needed during your postnatal period.

A postnatal plan can help you think about what life might look like with a new baby, talk through your wishes and concerns for this time, and ensure that your postnatal period is a joyful and comfortable time for you and your family.

Take some time to work through this document either alone or with your partner or someone from your support network and use it as an opportunity to feel prepared and empowered in your own choices for the fourth trimester.

YOUR POSTNATAL BODY

You will experience certain changes to your body after the birth of your baby - below are some tips to help you feel more prepared for this time.

POSTNATAL BODY

TIPS

AFTER PAINS - as the uterus returns to its original size you will feel involuntary contractions for a few days after birth.

Rest
 Hot water bottles
 Empty bladder often

BLEEDING - whether you've had a vaginal birth or caesarian you will bleed from your vagina. This bleeding 'lochia' is the body shedding the uterine lining which has built up over the past nine months. This bleeding will become heavier and eventually ease off.

Stock up on maternity pads for the weeks after birth
 Contact your midwife if you notice large clots

SORE PERENIUM - this area may be swollen, bruised or you may have stitches.

Ensure you keep this area clean
 Wear loose clothes
 Try a chilled witch hazel pad
 Have a warm sitz bath
 Sit slightly forward when having a wee

ISSUES URINATING - weeing after giving birth can feel sore or uncomfortable.

Pour warm water over the area when you go
 Urinate in the shower or bath

CONSTIPATION - many people feel worried about the first poo after birth, and may find they are constipated.

Drink plenty of water
 Eat fibre-rich foods such as beans and lentils, fruits and vegetables, wholemeal bread and pasta

HEMORRHOIDS - some women have hemorrhoids in pregnancy that continue on after birth and some find they get hemorrhoids from pushing during labour.

Hold a hot or cold compress on the area
 Have a warm sitz bath
 Use topical treatments or witch hazel pads
 Try a suppository

BREASTS - breasts may be larger, sore and you may experience some leaking from your nipples.

Frequent feeding will maintain milk supply and relieve full or engorged feeling breasts
 Gentle massage and a warm flannel will ease pain

CRACKED OR SORE NIPPLES

Ensuring baby has good positioning and latch can help ease sore and cracked nipples
 Seek help from a professional such as an infant feeding coach or lactation consultant
 Breastmilk on the affected area can reduce soreness

POSTNATAL BODY

TIPS

CAESAREAN - the scar will be just above your bikini line. Constipation and trapped wind is fairly common after this procedure.

Keep the scar clean and dry
Avoid heavy lifting and strenuous activity
Use the tips above to ease constipation and trapped wind
Wear loose clothes and knickers that lie above the scar line

NIGHT SWEATS - you may notice you sweat at night for the first few weeks. It is your body's way of getting rid of the extra fluid retained during pregnancy.

Wear light weight clothes
Drink plenty of water to keep hydrated

MOOD - the 'baby blues' affects some women around 2-4 days after birth due to hormonal changes. It affects around 85% of women, but will usually pass without needing any treatment. Postnatal depression can affect 10-15% of new mothers.

Self-help techniques, therapy and medication can help treat the symptoms of postnatal depression
If you are concerned please speak to your health visitor or GP and someone you trust

ACHES AND PAINS - it is normal to feel aches and soreness after giving birth.

Epsom salts in a bath can ease sore muscles
Warm showers and heating pads
Postnatal massage can be very relaxing and ease aching muscles
Use a footrest when sat down
Bend from the knees when lifting baby

PELVIC FLOOR - during pregnancy and birth the muscles in the pelvic floor can become stretched. Weight of the baby and pregnancy hormones as well as labour can put pressure on the area. Incontinence can sometimes be a result of this.

Pelvic floor exercises can help you regain control of the bladder
Work with a women's physiotherapist to ensure you are on the right track
Do not suffer in silence with postnatal incontinence - it is common but can be treatable

If you have concerns about any of the above symptoms please do speak to your GP. You may not find you experience all of these, and this is a list to mainly ensure you feel prepared for what may come after the birth of your baby and avoid any surprises or confusion.

YOUR NEW BABY'S ENVIRONMENT

Emulating a womb-like environment in your home for your baby will help your little one's transition into the world. Your baby is becoming accustomed to life outside the womb which might feel cold, bright and loud. Baby is wearing clothes and nappies after being naked for so long. They have been used to a confined space, being gently rocked as you moved, and never feeling hungry. They've not tried to feed from a bottle or breast before now, and they are having to communicate to you when they want to be comforted or fed.

There are some things that you can do to help baby feel safe and comforted:

- **NOISE** - creating familiar sounds that baby would have been used to in the womb - washing machine, Hoover and fans all can be comforting to a baby.
- **TOUCH** - holding a baby close to you (even better skin to skin!) can help them feel safe and comforted. A sling is a useful tool to keep baby close and held tightly as they were in the womb, while you can have hands free to eat a sandwich!
- **MOTION** - a baby moves every time their mother does in the womb which is why babies enjoy movement and can be rocked to sleep.
- **CALM ENVIRONMENT** - baby might be startled by noise or sudden movements so try to keep the space around baby calm and subdued if possible.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR YOUR POSTNATAL PERIOD

After baby is born, you may find you need more emotional, physical and emotional support. During pregnancy it is important you take some time to figure out who you can lean on and start to build up your own 'village' for when baby is here.

Take a look at the template on the next page and fill in your own thoughts as you read on. Each section is a good talking point for you and your partner or support network and is an opportunity for you to clarify plans and alternative options if certain scenarios arise rather than having to decide at the time.

VISITORS

Think about who you would be happy to have in the house in the first few weeks. Will you set any rules i.e. hand washing, no kissing the baby's face, time limit, children etc

HOUSEHOLD

Consider what you might need support with around the house such as tidying, laundry and food shopping. What are your ultimate priorities to keep on top of in the house in order to make you feel more in control of your environment?

HELP WITH OLDER CHILDREN

Who in your support network can do the school/nursery run or take your older children out to play while you tend to baby? How will you help your children adjust to/feel prepared for the new addition? How can you make your older children feel included in the care of the new baby? Who can help you carve out time together with your older children?

FOOD AND NUTRITION

Who will be making the meals, and can you batch cook in pregnancy to ensure you have nourishing, easy meals in the freezer? What comfort food makes you feel happy? What food can you ensure you have in the house to help alleviate constipation?

RECOVERY

Think about what supplies you might need or would like to have to help you with recovery. Are there any treatments or services you'd like to book such as postnatal massage, closing the bones ceremony, acupuncture, nutritional advice, sitz bath etc?

YOUR PARTNER

What kind of parental leave will your partner have? Have you discussed how you expect newborn life to look like and how you will support each other? What support will you receive when your partner goes back to work? Have you had a chance to talk through any concerns or what you're excited about?

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Who is your support network if things feel tough? Who can you talk to and how can they help?

USEFUL CONTACTS

Midwives _____

Health visitor _____

Doctor/GP _____

Postnatal doula _____

Feeding support _____

HELPLINES AND WEBSITES

- PANDAS Foundation - PND Awareness and Support
0808 1961 776 (free)
info@pandasfoundation.org.uk
- National Breastfeeding Helpline (9.30am-9.30pm)
0300 100 0212
- Association of Breastfeeding Mothers Helpline (9.30am-10.30pm)
0300 330 5453
- La Leche League Helpline (8am-11pm)
0345 120 2918
- www.firststepsnutrition.org/
- <https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/support-for-parents/>