


Nourishing the New Mother: The Lost Art of Postpartum Care

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Imagine that after giving birth, you are allowed simply to rest and cuddle your newborn for a month or longer. Loved ones do the cooking and cleaning and help you bathe and care for your infant. Hot teas accompany steaming baths—both filled with healing herbs meant to soothe and rejuvenate. Kind and knowledgeable women share their motherly wisdom and are on hand to help with breastfeeding and any new baby “hiccups.” You, the new mother, are treated with tenderness and respect. Your space is kept still and peaceful. After a few weeks, you are ready to share your little one with the world and to emerge from the secure confines of your home with confidence and strength.

Believe it or not, the practice of setting aside thirty, forty or more days for postpartum recovery is a common one worldwide and dates back thousands of years. An Ayurvedic text dating back to 400 BCE dictates that “A new mother should be treated with massage, warm baths, a specific diet and herbal drinks that prevent infection, promote vitality and alleviate *vata*” (an energetic force in the body).¹

In her book *The First Forty Days: The Essential Art of Nourishing the New Mother* by Heng Ou, Ou tells of her experience with *zuo yuezi*, the Chinese tradition of honoring and caring for the mother in the month after giving birth.¹ This practice has been honored in Chinese homes for over four

thousand years and is still alive and well today. Comparable traditions and rituals are found across the world, from Malaysia to India to Latin America.

In this time period, family members, friends, doulas and midwives are tasked with bathing mother

and baby (often with herbs instead of harsh soaps); massaging them with special oils and infusions; and cooking and serving special foods. While these foods vary by region and culture, they share certain things in common: they are warming, healing, full of vitamins and minerals and easy to digest. Many are specifically selected for their nutrient content and their ability to heal organs and boost lactation.

“MODERN” TIMES

In contrast, in what we might term “modern” times, many women in the Westernized world are given the impression that giving birth is something that one should immediately “bounce back” from, physically and otherwise. Employers are sometimes reluctant to give paid maternity leave, or the mother may simply be unable to take off much time from work. Extended family members may not live nearby or may not be in a position to help. Even spouses and otherwise loving partners sometimes do not understand the significant physical and emotional shifts that the new mother has just undergone by bringing forth new life.

As a result, mothers may feel overwhelmed and distraught. While their baby is rightfully being showered with attention, the mother is left to deal with all the lifestyle changes—and lack of sleep—that motherhood inevitably brings. Exhaustion in the first few weeks is commonplace and even expected. Sadly, if no one is looking after the new mother, adequate rest and nutrition can fall by the wayside in what could otherwise be a magical time of mother-baby bonding.

THE NEED FOR DEEP NUTRITION

What are the consequences of neglecting the mother in this delicate time period? Some cultures believe that neglect during the immediate postpartum period can have detrimental effects lasting into the woman’s menopausal years and beyond. Whether or not that is the case, it is clear that postpartum health is an often-overlooked aspect of women’s health in the United States and other countries.

It is worth noting that with the hormonal fluctuations and reconfigurations of familial dynamics that result after the birth of a new baby, some emotional changes are to be expected. Mood swings and moments of sadness may be quite normal, especially if the birth was a traumatic one. Some women, however, experience longer lasting issues such as severe depression and anxiety,

extreme fatigue, difficulty remembering and more. The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) estimates that postpartum depression affects 15 percent of women after childbirth.² Many scientists (and savvy Weston A. Price Foundation members) believe that the severe nutritional deficiencies that are commonplace among women today are one root cause of postpartum depression.

It is no secret that raising a child requires a massive amount of “building block material,” which is why traditional cultures practiced child spacing of at least three years between each child. This practice allows women to rebuild their nutritional stores. The average American woman, however, is often nutritionally depleted before conception even takes place, and her diet during pregnancy may be full of sugar and processed foods. In these cases, the body will rob the mother of nutrients to nourish the growing fetus, taking calcium from the bones and teeth, and reducing the stores of critical omega-3 fatty acids needed by the mother for emotional balance.

Nutrients that may be depleted include iron, folate, calcium, potassium, vitamin D, vitamin A and carotenoids, magnesium, iodine, omega-3, phosphorus, zinc, DHA and other essential fatty acids, B₁₂ and selenium.³ Scarcely enough, this can cause permanent changes to the mother’s brain and body. The new mother may have trouble remembering or learning new things, or may suffer from anxiety and depression. Decreased vitamin A stores can result in noticeable changes in vision. Before-and-after pictures sometimes show such changes as thinned lips and a curved spine.

Many women falsely believe that taking a prenatal pill before, during and after pregnancy will be enough to cover any deficiencies. So why not just take a pill? While some high-quality supplements can certainly be helpful, they are not close to being a panacea. Synthetic tablets do not contain the hundreds of isomers and related molecules that exist in nature so the body does not recognize and absorb them as easily. Moreover, the synthesis of these molecules in a lab creates unnatural byproducts that may in fact be harmful.

A study that looked at prenatal vitamin use in American women found that the women still developed deficits of niacin, thiamin and vitamins A, B₆ and B₁₂ that lasted into the third trimester (and presumably beyond).⁴ Prenatal vitamins also do not adequately address pregnant women’s

needs for vitamin D, long-chain essential fatty acids or choline. Choline is not part of any prenatal vitamin commonly found in the United States. In short, while certain high-quality prenatal formulations can be helpful, the answer, first and foremost, has to be on our dinner plate.

WARM AND NOURISHING FOODS

The Weston A. Price Foundation has been a pioneer in this respect, helping many a new mother as well as mothers-to-be with dietary recommendations that are based on ancient traditional wisdom (and validated by modern science). I have the Foundation's magnet listing the "Diet for Pregnant and Nursing Mothers" "on my refrigerator, and I think this should be given as a gift at every baby shower (along with a copy of *Nourishing Traditions*⁵ and *The Nourishing Traditions Book of Baby & Childcare*⁶). The diet has bullet points listing good foods to consume and foods to avoid.⁷

The list will be familiar to those who live a Wise Traditions lifestyle. The list includes organ meats and pastured meats from local sources (filled with iron, selenium and the B vitamins); eggs rich in choline, fatty acids and vitamin D; wild-caught seafood containing iodine and zinc; grass-fed butter with the famous X factor (vitamin K₂); natural cod liver oil for vitamin A; cultured dairy and raw milk (with many immune-boosting molecules and friendly gut bacteria); and warm and fragrant bone broths, soups and stews that can be easily consumed throughout the day.⁷

Sally Fallon Morrell's *Nourishing Traditions*⁵ and *Nourishing Broth: An Old-Fashioned Remedy for the Modern World*⁸ contain many delicious recipes, as does the westonaprice.org website. Meals can be made beforehand and frozen before the baby's due date, or you may request that your family set up a "meal train" for yourself or someone else who is expecting. Don't forget to ask for help in other ways as well: arranging for house-cleaning, laundry, grocery store errands or a warm rub with essential oils or herbal infusions can all go a long way to restore a new mother's zen.

FOODS THAT BOOST BREASTMILK

Chapter Seven of *The Nourishing Traditions Book of Baby & Childcare*⁶ contains many pages of advice for breastfeeding mothers. Breastfeeding mothers require more calories than the average woman and should take care to eat plenty of warming, nourishing foods. They should also drink generous amounts of fresh, clean water (or herbal teas). The book recommends raw milk, bone broths, soaked oatmeal and lacto-fermented beverages such as kombucha for boosting

breastmilk supply. Interestingly, these were all foods that my body naturally craved in the first couple of months of the postpartum period, when I felt like I was nursing around the clock. I remember when the lady who brings my raw milk stopped by. I couldn't seem to get enough of the rich cream, and I was so grateful to have it delivered. She mentioned that her mother always

told her that “Milk makes milk!” This is the sort of traditional wisdom that would benefit so many who have sadly been brainwashed by the “Diet Dictocrats” and suffer needlessly for it.

SHOULD I EAT MY PLACENTA?

What about placenta eating? This has recently become a common practice among some naturally-minded mothers, and many claim that it significantly boosts mood and energy levels. One Weston A. Price member recounts, “I was definitely on an emotional rollercoaster for a few months after the birth of my first child. Both my children were born at home, and with my second, I had a long conversation with the midwife about what to do with the placenta. In the end I decided to eat it! The midwife chopped it and divided it into five portions, which we froze. I put one portion into a smoothie for five days (it didn’t have much of a flavor, they just tasted like ordinary smoothies). I felt so strong and emotionally stable, it was like night and day compared to my first pregnancy. It just seemed to work to really bring my whole system back to a stable, functioning state. I know it’s not an option that many women will go for, but I would do it again in a heartbeat.”

For those who do not want to go that route, eating a diet rich in organ meats like liver will also help replenish iron levels and thereby improve mood and vitality. Another member shares this: “After I had my daughter, I struggled to balance all my responsibilities as a mom of two. I had been pregnant or breastfeeding for three years, and my body was feeling the effects of years of giving to other humans. My threshold for stress was so much lower, and I found myself frustrated or full-on angry at unreasonable things. Then I would feel guilty and depressed because of the way I was reacting. It took two years after my daughter was born for my body to go back to normal and my hormones to finally level out. Taking cod liver oil and dessicated liver tablets definitely helped.”

POSTPARTUM THYROIDITIS

New mothers who are feeling particularly fatigued for extended periods may consider having their thyroid gland checked. Symptoms of hypothyroidism can include mental fog, dry skin, weight gain, intolerance to cold, constipation and hair loss. This can be diagnosed as Hashimoto’s thyroiditis or postpartum thyroiditis. Dr. Kelly Brogan writes, “In postpartum thyroiditis, this presentation is

typically preceded by a period of hyperthyroidism where women can feel over-energized, suffer from insomnia, diarrhea, anxiety and precipitous weight-loss—these are the women who ‘bounce back’ quickly after the baby only to be peeling themselves off the ground nine months later.” She states that about 10 percent of women develop this condition, and it frequently goes undiagnosed

or misdiagnosed.⁹

There are now home testing kits for comprehensive thyroid testing. In addition, home test kits can test for key nutrients before conception or after giving birth, including omega-3 fatty acids, B vitamins (including folic acid) and vitamin D. Some companies also offer a breastmilk test that shows how much DHA is in your breastmilk.

NURTURING NEW MOMS

If you or someone you love is expecting a little one, be sure to plan for a special month or two after giving birth. While the newborn certainly deserves to be showered in love, attention and those cute little booties and headbands, the new mother also needs to be soothed, caressed, cared for and listened to. Heng Ou includes in her book this quote from a Chumash medicine woman from Ensenada, Mexico: “When any mother has a problem, the first thing I say to her is, ‘You need to be petted! Put your feet up, your body needs to be boosted with touch and stimulated if you want to get through this time.’”¹

Although it may take some planning and foresight in our fast-paced society—and some explanatory discussions with family members and friends—bringing back the lost art of nurturing and nourishing the new mother will likely do wonders not only for her but for the whole family, with dividends that pay off for decades and generations to come.

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POSTPARTUM RECOVERY SOUP

Sarah Ruiz, a Weston A. Price Foundation chapter leader from North Carolina and a certified integrative nutrition health coach, shared this recipe for a postpartum recovery soup on [westonaprice.org](https://www.westonaprice.org/postpartum-recovery-soup/) (see the full post at [westonaprice.org/postpartum-recovery-soup/](https://www.westonaprice.org/postpartum-recovery-soup/)).

The soup features pig's feet, Chinese black vinegar, coconut sugar and fresh ginger. If pig's feet are hard to find in your area, a simple chicken noodle soup or beef bone broth will support postpartum recovery just as well.

INGREDIENTS

2 pasture-raised pig trotters

2 1/2 cups Chinese black vinegar (available at Asian markets) or balsamic vinegar (if you can't find the black vinegar)

1/4 cup + 2 tablespoons coconut sugar (helps to balance the vinegar in the recipe)

1/2 cup coconut aminos or naturally fermented organic soy sauce

Filtered water

2-inch piece of organic ginger, sliced

Pastured eggs (at least two per bowl of soup)

Organic zoodles (spiralized organic zucchini), brown rice noodles or soaked/cooked brown rice (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS


1. Get your butcher to cut the pig trotters into one-inch pieces (optional, but extracts the minerals better).
2. Cover the trotters with filtered water in a large pot, cover with a lid and bring to a boil for ten minutes.
3. Drain the water and rinse with cold filtered water.
4. Fill the pot containing the trotters halfway full with filtered water. Add the black vinegar, coconut sugar, coconut aminos and ginger. If the trotters are not covered, add more water until they are covered.
5. Cover with a lid and bring to a boil. Once it reaches a boil, simmer for 45 minutes.
6. Toward the end of the simmering time, boil eggs to have ready for the soup.
7. Add boiled pastured eggs to a bowl and cover with soup. You can add organic zoodles (spiralized organic zucchini), brown rice noodles or soaked/cooked brown rice to the bowl to make

this a more complete meal, but it is completely optional. Be sure to drink this daily for the first six weeks postpartum. Enjoy!

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home testing, or visit the resources at ThrivingAfterBaby.com.

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