THE GENTLE NEST · POSTPARTUM GUIDE

Getting Ready for Your Fourth Trimester

A guide for wherever your birth story takes you, compiled with care.

First, congratulations! Whatever your birth looks like, vaginal or caesarean, planned or full of surprises, you are about to step into an extraordinary transformation. This guide is here so you enter your postpartum season with clarity, calm, and a little less "what do I do now?" It isn't a checklist to complete or memorize, just a gentle reference to keep close whenever you need reassurance.

At The Gentle Nest, care is grounded in Ojojo Omo, a traditional Yoruba postpartum philosophy that views mother and baby as one continuous, inseparable focus. Caring for you is caring for your baby; they are two sides of the very same heart. Take what is useful to your family, and feel free to leave whatever doesn't fit your story.

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01 Your body, in the first few weeks

Your body just did something profound, and it needs real time to recover, not just a weekend. Healing is an unfolding process.

FOR EVERYONE, HOWEVER YOU GAVE BIRTH

- **Lochia (postpartum bleeding):** bleeding is normal for up to six weeks as your womb heals. It begins deeper red, then shifts over time to pink, soft brown and yellowish-white.
- **Uterine involution:** gentle cramping is common as your uterus returns to its pre-pregnancy size, especially while nursing.
- **Rest is productive care:** when thoughts of laundry, thank-you cards or chores stir up worry, jot them down in a notebook beside your bed to clear your mind.
- **Fragmented sleep:** waking often with your newborn is temporary, a rhythm you're both still building.

VAGINAL RECOVERY & ANCESTRAL GROUNDING

- **A tender perineum:** soreness and swelling are common. Room-temperature herbal soaks, cooling pads and a gentle peri bottle can bring real comfort.
- **Seating support:** a soft cushion or donut pillow, or sitting on one cheek at a time, can ease pressure in the first two weeks.
- **Partner-assisted belly warming:** a warm towel or compress placed gently over your lower belly offers soothing warmth and comfort. Always keep a soft cloth or layer of clothing between your skin and the heat to prevent burns.

CAESAREAN RECOVERY & GENTLE MOVEMENT

- **Major abdominal healing:** a caesarean asks for deep rest and gentle pacing, with full internal healing taking six weeks or longer.
- **Early movement:** wiggling your toes, dangling your legs over the bed or taking slow steps around the room, as your care team encourages, can help ease gas discomfort.
- **Incision protection:** hold a soft pillow against your lower belly when you cough, sneeze or laugh. Keep the area dry, using a hairdryer on a cool setting after showers.
- **Gentle digestion:** some care teams suggest chewing gum in the days after surgery to help your digestion wake up. Ask yours.

Always contact your healthcare provider if you have a fever, bleeding that soaks a pad in an hour, foul-smelling discharge, severe pain you can't manage, or thoughts of harming yourself.

02 Warming nourishment

Traditional postpartum care centres on warm food that supports your energy and is gentle on digestion. This season is about abundance, rich nutrients and ease.

- **Warm, easy foods:** steamed dishes, simmered stews and broths settle easily and feel deeply nourishing.
- **Nutrient-dense plates:** iron-rich foods (meats, lentils, leafy greens), healthy fats (avocado, nut butter, olive oil) and probiotic foods (yogurt, kefir) to support your energy.
- **Hydration:** warm herbal teas, broths and water help you feel your best, especially while feeding. Pale-yellow urine is a reassuring sign you're drinking enough.
- **Mind & mood:** low levels of nutrients like iron and vitamin D can affect energy and mood, so it's worth asking your care provider about them. Feeding your body helps care for your mind too.

03 Feeding your baby

However you feed your baby is the right path for your family. My role is to help you feel grounded, confident and supported in whatever feeding looks like in your home.

- **Nursing & latching:** give yourself and your baby real time to learn. Cluster feeding during growth spurts (wanting to eat every 45 minutes) is usually normal, not a sign of low milk. Some early tenderness can happen, but ongoing pain usually means the latch needs adjusting.
- **Bottle & formula feeding:** a complete, loving way to nourish your baby. Paced bottle feeding (holding the bottle more horizontally and letting baby pause) creates a calm rhythm.
- **Combination feeding:** blending methods is a practical bridge that honours your capacity, without judgment.
- **A simple latch check:** wide open mouth, flanged lips, chin resting gently against your breast, and soft swallowing sounds. If feeding hurts, we can look at positioning together, or I'll connect you with a lactation consultant.

04 Sleep, baby's and yours

Understanding newborn sleep takes away the pressure to "fix" something that is completely natural.

- **Safe sleep foundations:** place baby on their back on a firm, flat sleep surface free of loose blankets, pillows or toys. Room-sharing, with a bassinet beside your bed, offers safe closeness in the early months.
- **Newborn sleep rhythms:** newborns sleep 16 to 18 hours a day in short, scattered bursts. Most begin settling into a day and night rhythm around 12 weeks. A dark, cool, quiet room helps you fall back asleep faster.
- **Sleep cues:** watch for subtle tired signs: turning away from stimulation, rubbing eyes, stiffening arms or pulling at ears.
- **Protecting your rest:** even one uninterrupted 2 to 3 hour stretch of sleep makes a real difference to your energy and clarity.

05 Your newborn, demystified

Newborns are wired to need you close, often and unpredictably. That's biology, not spoiling.

- **Feeding cues:** rooting, hands to mouth and quiet fussing are early hunger signs. Crying is a late one.
- **Diapers:** expect roughly 6 or more wet diapers and several soiled ones a day once feeding is established, a good sign baby's getting enough.
- **Crying:** crying is your baby's first language. It communicates a need and is never a sign you're failing.
- **Delicate skin:** limit full baths to once or twice a week with plain warm water, pat dry gently, and soften dry spots with pure, unscented lotions or oils.

06 You matter too

The weeks after birth aren't just about the baby; a new you is born too. Feeling emotional, weepy or overwhelmed in the first two weeks ("baby blues") is very common as hormones shift.

If low mood, anxiety, intrusive thoughts or numbness last longer than two weeks or get in the way of daily life, please tell your doctor or me. Postpartum depression and anxiety are common and treatable, with real, compassionate care available. You deserve to feel like yourself again.

07 Family, friends & everyone's opinions

Everyone will have opinions on how you should parent. You don't have to carry all of it.

- **Set clear visitor expectations:** simple preferences like "we love visits after 1 p.m." or "please text before coming over" prevent friction.
- **A polite boundary:** "Thanks for sharing, we're doing it this way because it's working for us" is a complete sentence.
- **Turn visitors into helpers:** ask loved ones for specific tasks, like holding baby while you shower, putting away a load of laundry or dropping off warm food.

08 If you have other little ones at home

A new baby is a big adjustment for siblings too. Excitement, jealousy and confusion can all show up in the same afternoon.

- **Give them a safe role:** a small, safe job (gently holding baby's hand, singing to them) helps them feel included rather than replaced.
- **One-on-one time:** even 10 to 15 minutes alone with each parent, like a walk or a bedtime story, goes a long way.
- **Toddlers (around 1 to 2):** simple, warm narration helps: "This is your baby brother, he's going to live with us."
- **Kids around 2 to 4:** a "big sibling" basket with a few small toys or snacks for busy newborn moments, and a small gift "from the baby" when they first meet, can soften the transition.
- **Temporary regressions:** potty training slipping or wanting a bottle again are common and pass. Patience usually helps more than correction.

09 Intimacy & connection

The six-week checkup is a guideline for tissue healing, not an emotional deadline. Readiness depends on your energy, comfort and desire.

- **Physical shifts:** dryness, tenderness and changes in sensation are common after both vaginal and caesarean births, and usually ease with time. Go slowly, use lubrication and keep talking openly.
- **Low desire is normal:** feeling touched-out or exhausted leaves very little energy for physical intimacy.
- **Non-sexual closeness:** holding hands, a real hug or genuinely asking about each other's day rebuilds connection long before you feel ready for more.

10 A note on support

Pregnancy and postpartum are vulnerable transitions. I share with every client that support exists if a relationship ever feels unsafe.

If you ever need a confidential ear, I'm here without judgment. You can also reach Alberta's 24/7 Family Violence Info Line at **310-1818** (free, confidential, no area code needed).

11 Building your family through adoption or fostering

If this is your path, welcome. Physical recovery looks different, but welcoming a child is just as profound.

- **Big emotions:** joy, anxiety and worries about bonding are completely normal.
- **Your wellbeing:** adoptive and foster parents experience postpartum mood and anxiety struggles too. Your mental health matters just as much.
- **Feeding:** if you're inducing lactation or using a supplemental feeding system, I can support you practically alongside your lactation consultant.
- **My role:** lightening the practical load so you have room to bond, adjust and trust your instincts.

12 Pets & baby

Introducing a newborn to family pets goes best with calm, steady preparation.

- **Before baby arrives:** make sure pets are vaccinated and comfortable, and gradually introduce new sounds (a recording of a baby crying) and gear (stroller, swing), paired with treats or play.
- **Calm first meetings:** keep early greetings calm and supervised. Never leave pets and newborns alone together.
- **Hygiene:** wash hands after handling pets, and keep cribs, bassinets and play mats pet-free.
- **Read their body language:** a relaxed body and soft gaze mean calm curiosity; stiff posture or growling means give space right away.

13 What I'm here for

As your postpartum doula, I bring together traditional postpartum care and gentle education, so your family is surrounded with unhurried care. Caring for you and caring for your baby aren't two separate jobs; they're one continuous rhythm.

Questions about any of this? That's what our visits are for. Nothing here replaces your doctor's guidance or your own intuition.

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wrapping and warm herbal recovery baths.

- **Baby care, woven in:** gentle newborn cue coaching, soothing, and holding baby so you can nap, shower or simply breathe.
- **Emotional holding:** unhurried space to share your birth story, talk through doubts and feel fully seen.
- **The right specialist:** if something is outside what I can help with, like specialized lactation, pelvic floor physio or mental health support, I'll point you to the right person.

There's no version of postpartum that's "doing it wrong" in front of me. My job is to meet you exactly where you are.