In Section VI we offered a few tips and ideas for preparing for your postpartum recovery. The more you can do in advance to prepare, the more you can focus your energy on rest and healing after your baby comes. There is a huge range of postpartum experiences for women. Your level of discomfort and length of time for recovery will depend on how well you have taken care of yourself throughout your pregnancy, how long your labor was, how difficult your labor was, and how well you care for yourself after. This section will give you some idea of what to expect post-baby and what you can do to ensure a thorough recovery.

THE HEALING PROCESS

Birthing a baby takes a tremendous amount of physical, mental and emotional energy. The body is amazing and will recover from the experience completely, provided that you are taking care of yourself and being careful not to push yourself too much. Below we will discuss exactly what self-care steps and time frame your body requires to heal, but first it is helpful to understand the healing process behind each discomfort.

- **Uterine Cramping and Vaginal Bleeding**
  The uterus is normally quite small, housed well within the pelvis. But by the end of a full term pregnancy, your uterus has stretched and grown all the way up to your rib cage! Immediately after birth, your uterus will begin to firm up and shrink back to its original size, shape and position. The process is called “involution” and it causes uterine cramping- often referred to as “after birth pains.” The level of pain in postpartum cramping varies from woman to woman. Typically, the cramping intensifies with each subsequent baby. Around day 5, after birth pains usually subside; the uterus is well on its way to returning to pre-pregnancy size and shape (although it will take about 6 weeks for this process to fully complete) and the placenta site has shut down all of the veins and artery structures. Your body will form a type of scab to seal the site where the placenta detached, lessening your body’s urgency to cramp. This is done from the inside out and will not leave scarring.

When your nipples are stimulated, the hormone oxytocin is produced. Oxytocin causes your uterus to contract. This is an extremely smart design on behalf of your body! As your baby nurses, your body produces oxytocin and the contractions help shrink and firm your uterus. (Oxytocin also affects our emotional state and promotes bonding with baby). Because nipple stimulation promotes contraction of the uterus, many women will find breast feeding within the
first 3-5 days will trigger cramping. Again, this usually subsides around the 5th day, and seems to improve dramatically when your milk comes in.

Along with the cramping, you will also experience vaginal bleeding. Again, the amount of bleeding varies from woman to woman but will typically be like a very heavy period for the first few days. Then, the bleeding will taper off to a more normal menstrual-like flow for another week. At this point, the bleeding will likely decrease to spotting. Spotting can continue off and on for up to 6 weeks postpartum.

**Pain Relief:** For some women, postpartum cramping can be quite painful. Cramping usually intensifies if you are too physically active so it is important to rest and stay off your feet as much as possible. (Be sure to read the recommendations for appropriate physical activity after childbirth below). Keeping your bladder empty will also reduce the intensity of postpartum cramping. Warm compresses can also soothe cramping. Although breastfeeding often triggers the cramping, it helps at the same time by speeding up the recovery. Red raspberry leaf tea tonifies the uterus and can help relieve cramping. You may find the techniques you used to work through labor contraction pains to be equally helpful in working through after birth pains: breathe, relax your body, and visualize the uterus healing and shrinking. The pains are helping your body to heal. If your cramping is beyond what you can tolerate and you feel you need the relief of pain medication, be sure to read the section below on pain medication to help you select one that will best support your recovery process.

**When to call your provider:** Normal postpartum uterine cramping should subside by day 5. If you are experiencing severe cramping, cramping that lasts longer than 5 days, excessive bleeding (soaks through a heavy menstrual pad in an hour or less), fever, burning urination, blood in your urine, or foul smelling discharge, it is possible that you have a uterine infection and you should contact your provider immediately. It is also possible that the uterus is unable to completely firm due to a blood clot or bits of placenta or membranes that were left behind. This typically results in heavier bleeding and excessively painful cramping and merits an immediate call to your provider.

- **Round Ligament Cramping**
  Just as your uterus must contract and shrink back to its pre-pregnancy size and shape, so must your round ligaments. Some women will not feel this at all. Others will experience a cramping or jabbing feeling in the side that can last for up to 2 weeks.

  **Pain Relief:** Postpartum round ligament pain is often triggered by too much physical activity (especially activity that involved twisting). The best pain relief is to reduce your physical activity. After the strain of pregnancy and birth, your muscles and ligaments may be in a state of spasm which will cause additional pain and cramping. Structural integration body work can relieve your body of these spasms.
• **Vaginal Tears, Abrasions, and Skid Marks**

It is quite common to tear a bit with vaginal deliveries. The vaginal and labial tissues are made up of tiny folds that are designed to stretch and even to tear some. Because of the folds, when the tissues tear they fold back on themselves. The tissue produces a glue-like substance to fill in and seal off the tears and to regenerate new tissue. In other words, the vagina and labia are designed to self-heal minor tears, abrasions and skid marks quite well. Occasionally, tearing is more severe and will require stitches. The job of the stitches is to hold the tissue in place until the natural “glue” can take over.

Normal tearing, abrasions and skid marks can feel like sharp, jagged pain for some time (depends on the degree of the tears). Discomfort from tears will often come and go. At some point, the pain will turn to an itching sensation; this is all part of the normal healing process of a tissue tear. Generally, vaginal and labial tears take a good 6 weeks to heal, and then another 6 weeks for the nerves and regenerative tissues to fill back in. If the tearing is so severe it goes into the muscle layer or if you suffer nerve damage or hernias from labor, the healing process can take months. If your tears or abrasions become infected, possibly even longer than that. Later, you may even notice some sharp sensations or discomfort at the sites of tears with intercourse. (It is very important that you wait until you are fully healed and have been given the green light by your provider before engaging in sexual intercourse - minimally a 6 weeks wait).

**Pain Relief:** Just after birth, cool compresses or ice packs can provide a tremendous amount of relief for tearing. If you are having a hospital or birth center birth, you will be offered some form of cold compress. If you are having a home birth, you will want to use the cool compresses you have prepared in advance. Ice or compresses can continue to offer relief for several days postpartum, so it is a good idea to have some on-hand at home regardless of where you birth. Urinating with fresh tears is usually quite uncomfortable. The best pain relief is to fill a peri rinse bottle with warm water and squirt on yourself as you are urinating. In addition, you can buy or make special herbal healing rinses for your peri rinse bottles. You may even fill a sitz bath with an herbal rinse or warm salt water to soak in. Doing your Kegel exercises will speed the healing process, as will plenty of rest and excellent food (bone marrow broth and your fermented cod liver supplements will aid significantly in healing). Similar to cramping, if your tears suddenly begin to hurt again it is a good indication that you are physically pushing yourself to do too much. There are some ointments and balms on the market for soothing vaginal and labial tears and abrasions. If you have stitches, you will need to ask your provider if the product is safe to use (some products can dissolve your stitches prematurely). Balms can offer a lot of relief once you get to the itching stage of your healing process.

**When to call:** If you spike a fever, notice foul smelling vaginal discharge or experience a sudden and intense increase in pain level, it is possible there is an infection and you should contact your provider immediately.
• Cesarean Recovery

If your baby was born Cesarean, you will be closely monitored by hospital staff for the first 24 hours, and are typically kept at the hospital for 3-4 days. You will likely feel groggy and possibly even nauseous for the first 24-48 hours. But, you can hold and nurse your baby straight away.

A Cesarean surgery cuts through the muscle layer of your abdomen, and muscles take much longer to reconnect and heal than tissue at the surface level. It will take approximately 4 weeks for the incision to heal and it is critical that you take it easy during this time period. To fully recover and heal from a Cesarean birth will take a good 9 months, and it is not unusual to have occasional pains in the area for the first year after the surgery.

Muscles require excellent nutrition, rest and gradual exercise to fully heal. If you take proper care of yourself (see the “Rule of 6” for Cesarean births below in the self-care section) your uterus and muscles will heal well. You will be given specific instructions for how to care for your incision and guidelines for physical activity. You will need to move your body around after a Cesarean birth, yet not overexert yourself: it is a fine balancing act. Finding the balance can be tricky because you will be given strong pain medication which can distort your sense of how well you are doing. In other words, because you won’t feel the full pain, you might think you are more fully healed than you actually are. You will be instructed to lift nothing more than your baby for the first 6 weeks, this is very sound advice. And, you may even find lifting your baby to be too difficult for the first week or so. You will need to have someone to help you for a few weeks after a Cesarean delivery. If your partner will need to return to work immediately, it is a good time to ask a family member to stay with you and help out.

During the surgery, the placenta and other uterine content will be manually removed from your uterus. You will be given Pitocin to control the bleeding and get your uterus to contract so that it can begin the same process of shrinking back to original size. These steps, combined with your pain relief medication, will most likely prevent you from feeling the after birth uterine cramps. However, you will have vaginal bleeding just the same as you would with a vaginal birth.

If your Cesarean was unplanned, it can be common to experience some degree of disappointment or grief. You may question if the surgery was legitimately necessary. Some women even experience a Cesarean as a “failure.” If you are experiencing this, it is important to talk through your feelings with someone whom you trust. It may take some support to move past your expectations of how things should have gone and to embrace your baby’s birth as it did happen. Above and beyond all else, it is essential that you do not blame yourself or your body. In labor, our utmost important job is to bring our baby safely into the world. Some births require more assistance than others- you have not failed yourself or your baby.

Pain Relief: A Cesarean delivery is a major surgery and you will require pain medication during and after the procedure. An anesthesiologist will administer a heavy epidural or spinal block for
the surgery, and possibly even morphine for additional pain relief postpartum. After the surgery, your pain will be monitored by your care staff over the next few days and treated accordingly. Usually post Cesarean pain is relieved with narcotics, acetaminophen (Tylenol), and possibly ibuprofen (we recommend avoiding the ibuprofen). You will need to stay on top of the pain. Once you get to the point of really hurting, it will take a far higher dose of pain medication to relieve you.

Once you are sent home, you will be given instructions for on-going pain relief. It might be a good idea to keep your pain medication at a low enough dose to feel some discomfort so that you can better gauge appropriate physical activity. But again, do not allow your pain to get intense or it will be harder to relieve. Below, there is a section on pain medication that you might reference as a guide after the first 5-7 days of your recovery.

It can help to keep a pillow nearby and hold over your incision site if you need to cough or sneeze.

During the surgery, air can become trapped inside your abdomen which can cause a lot of pain for some women during recovery. It can feel like extremely intense gas pains. If you are experiencing this, it will be important to get up, if possible, and move around a bit. If you cannot get out of bed yet, at least move your legs around or ask a nurse to assist you. The movement will help to release the trapped air and relieve the pain.

If you are having intense nausea or vomiting after your surgery, your provider will likely prescribe you something to ease the nausea. You will also be given stool softeners to keep your bowels moving without having to strain at all.

**When to call:** You will not be sent home from the hospital until your provider is confident that you are healing well from the surgery. Once you are home, you should contact your provider immediately if you spike a fever (above 100 degrees), experience heavy vaginal bleeding (if you soak through a pad in less than an hour or have a sudden increase in flow), experience a sudden increase in pain at the incision site, notice any blood or fluid leaking from your incision site, or show any signs of infection around your incision site (red edges, new swelling, etc.).

- **Breast Engorgement and Sore Nipples**
  Once your baby is born, your body will release Prolactin, a hormone which produces milk. Circulation will increase to your breasts and in 2-5 days milk will fill your breasts. (This happens regardless of whether or not you are nursing). The increase of circulation and milk will "engorge" your breasts, making them much bigger and rock hard. It can be uncomfortable at best and painful at worst.

  If you have had a hospital birth, a lactation consultant will likely meet with you to help make
sure your baby is latching correctly and to answer your questions on breastfeeding. If you have a birth center or home birth, your midwife can assist you with this. You will want to make sure your baby is latching correctly from the very beginning to reduce nipple soreness. But, it is normal for skin to get sore from rubbing and your nipples will be sore from nursing for a while even if your baby’s latch is perfect. Try to be patient, nipple skin is tender but heals incredibly well. If your baby’s latch is good, your nipples will toughen and it will no longer hurt to nurse.

We will discuss breastfeeding in much more detail in our third seminar, Newborn Care. This will include tips for helping your baby to latch well and problem solving common breastfeeding challenges.

Relief: If you are nursing, the best relief for engorgement is nursing. You will want to nurse every 3 hours minimally. Your body is working to determine how much milk is needed. The more your baby nurses, the more quickly your milk supply will establish and engorgement will be relieved. If your baby wants to sleep long stretched without nursing, you will have to wake him and encourage him to nurse as much as possible during this stage. Spending time skin to skin will keep your baby interested in nursing and help your milk to come in nicely. You can become so engorged that your baby is unable to latch onto your nipple. If this happens, you will need to use a breast pump or your hand to manually extract enough milk to reduce firmness from your breast so baby can latch. It can help to massage your breast a bit or lay a warm wash cloth across your breasts while baby nurses to encourage a “let down” of your milk. After baby nurses, laying a cool wash cloth across your breasts for a bit can be soothing. After a few days, your milk supply will establish to meet the needs of your baby and engorgement will subside.

If you are not planning to nurse, you will still have breast engorgement in 2-5 days. You will want to wear a comfortable, supportive bra and avoid any nipple stimulation at all. Keep cold compresses on your breasts to discourage milk production. After a few days, your milk will begin to dry up naturally.

As mentioned, nipples will be sore until they toughen so the best cure for sore nipples is to keep nursing. However, soreness should eventually subside. Nipple balm that is safe for babies, cool pads, and allowing your nipples to air dry with a bit of breast milk on them are great remedies for normal nipple soreness. Also, change up the position you feed your baby in to give specific sore areas of your nipples a break (i.e. cradle hold, football hold, laying on your side with baby facing you). If soreness persists, or if you begin to experience nipple cracking or blistering, this might indicate a problem. It is a good idea to immediately consult your midwife or lactation consultant for advice. There could be an issue with latch, nipple structure, or baby’s mouth and tongue features. CFT or Craniosacral therapy for your baby can also help with nursing difficulties.

It is also important to remember that babies will nurse for comfort as well as hunger. If your baby wants to nurse constantly it will make your nipples especially sore. You will need to
investigate what is causing your baby so much discomfort that she is constantly trying to soothe herself. Again, our third seminar will help you to troubleshoot these types of challenges.

- **Bladder Incontinence**
  The muscles and ligaments of your pelvic floor support your bladder. Pregnancy can stress your pelvic floor and cause the muscles and ligaments to overstretch which can lead to bladder incontinence during pregnancy. It is usually mild, leaking some urine when you cough, sneeze or laugh. Childbirth can further stress or even injure these ligaments and muscles which may extend bladder incontinence to post-pregnancy. Most women will experience relief from bladder incontinence within a few weeks of delivery. If you have had a particularly difficult labor (such as your baby coming through the birth canal in a challenging position or required the use of forceps or vacuum) postpartum bladder incontinence can be a result of nerve damage and may linger for months or even longer.

  **Relief:** Kegels are crucial postpartum exercises to strengthen your pelvic floor after the strain of pregnancy and childbirth. If you are experiencing bladder incontinence, it is especially important to be doing Kegels every day. It is also a good idea to seek immediate support from your structural integration practitioner. There is much that can be done to support your body as it works to put everything back in place. If the incontinence is a result of nerve damage, it will take time for the nerves to repair and heal. Excellent nutrition, adequate rest and sleep, structural integration work and BodyTalk will all speed the process of nerve recovery.

  **When to call:** If you are experiencing postpartum bladder incontinence you will definitely want to discuss this with your provider who may want to examine you and rule out a urinary tract infection.

- **Bowel Movement**
  Passing your first bowels after birth can be a bit frightening! Even a bit of pushing can strain at your vaginal tears or stiches and feel nerve-wracking. Plus, your intestines may have also been strained during labor and some women will experience postpartum hemorrhoids which can cause pain and/or bleeding with bowel movements.

  **Relief:** To ensure your first few bowel movements go smoothly, you will want to be certain to have plenty of fiber and water in your diet. In addition, taking stool softeners for the first few days is a good idea to help ease the chore.

  If you are suffering from hemorrhoids, witch hazel or aloe vera can help soothe and heal your rectum (if your hemorrhoids are internal, you can freeze tiny balls of aloe vera and insert into the rectum like a suppository). Kegel exercises will promote circulation to the area and help to heal them as well. Avoid sitting on hard chairs or surfaces until you have fully healed. Stool softeners, fiber and water will definitely be beneficial if you have hemorrhoids as it is important
to keep your bowels soft and steady and avoid any straining at all.

SELF CARE

With the responsibility of a newborn, it can be quite challenging to find the time and energy to also take care of yourself. However, it is absolutely critical that you prioritize your own care as much as your baby’s. If you do not, you will lack the energy and stamina to properly care for your baby after the buzz and adrenaline wear off and the lack of sleep kicks in. In fact, if you are not taking good care of yourself you will be far more likely to develop symptoms of postpartum depression or anxiety. Do not underestimate what your body has accomplished: you have grown and carried a human being for nine months, and then utilized every ounce of physical, mental and emotional energy you possess to bring your baby into the world. It is understandable that you will need a lot of time and self-care to recover. Imagine your body as a fuel tank: once your tank is out of gas, you have to refuel. Unfortunately, it takes half the amount of time to drain your fuel tank as it takes to replenish it. The two most critical things you need to recover from something like childbirth are nourishing food, and plenty of sleep. Because sleep may be a challenge with a newborn in the house, it becomes even more important that your food is excellent.

- Nutrition
  Towards the end of pregnancy, your baby and uterus are so big they push into your stomach. This often means you feel full after a few bites. After giving birth, your stomach will immediately be relieved of the pressure and you will find you have a far greater interest and capacity for food. On top of this, you have just given birth and many women find themselves absolutely famished for days, even weeks, after delivery. If you have had a very long or difficult labor you will be especially depleted, but even an extremely fast labor can physically, mentally and emotionally drain you. Plus, your body is now going through a brand new task of bringing in your milk and this too takes a lot of energy. If you will be breastfeeding, you will still be eating for two for quite some time. If you are unable to prepare a stockpile of freezer meals before labor, at least prepare a few that are packed with nutrition for immediately after birth. As mentioned previously, bone marrow broth is a postpartum super-food, so soups and stews with a bone marrow broth base are fantastic. You will lose blood in childbirth and so many women crave hearty, iron rich foods to replenish.

For the first 3-4 weeks after childbirth, it is essential that you are eating a minimum of three meals a day plus snacks when you are hungry (which may be frequently in the beginning). Ideally, you have plenty of highly nutritious meals in your freezer, ready to go. Alternatively, ask family and friends to support you by cooking a nutritious meal. Basically, you will want to follow the same guidelines you’ve already been following prenatally for your diet: whole, unprocessed, organic food in wide variety. If you are breastfeeding, go easy on the gluten, dairy, sugar and caffeine (eliminate them entirely if possible for at least awhile) as MANY newborns struggle to digest these foods.
Some babies are a little more demanding than others. If you find that your baby requires so much attention that it is a challenge to find time to prepare meals for yourself, plan ahead. Crock pot dinners can save you a lot of time. Anytime you put in the energy to cook, be sure to make enough for lunch the next day as well. Eggs are a very fast, easy and highly nutritious option for breakfast. When you grocery shop, choose things that are healthy but will not require preparation for snacks throughout the day: fresh or dried fruit, nuts, trail mix, veggies and hummus dip, coconut milk yogurts, apple slices with almond butter, etc.

Also, it will be extremely important to stay hydrated. Drinking too little water can quite rapidly diminish your milk supply. A good rule of thumb is to pour yourself a glass of water before sitting down to feed your baby. Making a habit to sip water while nursing should keep you well hydrated.

You will also want to be sure to continue taking all of the same supplements. The fish oil, cod liver/butter oil, and probiotics will not only speed your recovery, they will get into your breast milk and continue to support your baby’s body and brain development and the building of her healthy intestinal flora.

- **Sleep**
  The importance of sleep cannot be overstated; there is reason that sleep deprivation is used as a form of torture! Some level of sleep deprivation is normal with a newborn in the house, although there are things you can do to help your little one to become an excellent sleeper (this is one of the topics that will be covered in our Newborn Care class). Even still, newborns want (and need) to eat frequently which can make it quite challenging to get a good stretch of sleep. If your baby was born prematurely, this will be especially true as their stomachs are so tiny they cannot eat much at a time. If your baby is full term and has been relieved of cranial pressures and body tensions acquired in-utero and/or childbirth, it is very possible for her to sleep at least 4 consecutive hours at night straight away. Most balanced and healthy Infants will have at least one long, uninterrupted stretch of sleep per day. (By the end of the first month it can be a 5-6 hour stretch, and continue to lengthen with age). If you can help your little one to make this stretch happen at night then it will be possible for you to get an uninterrupted stretch of sleep as well relatively soon. This is critical. You require a minimum of 4 straight hours of sleep. This means that at least once in a 24 hour period of time, you need 4 hours straight in which you are not woken from your slumber. (You will need more than a total of 4 hours of sleep a day, this is simply referring to one stretch of uninterrupted sleep).

The age old advice to “sleep when your baby sleeps” is perhaps the best advice one can give a new mother. In order to do this you have to be flexible and willing to give up your “super mom” title. When your baby naps during the day, chose to nap with him rather than do laundry or clean. If you have to go back to work early or have additional children at home this will be impossible. Therefore it is especially important that you are somehow finding a way to sleep at
night. If your baby’s longest stretch of sleep begins at 7pm and you cannot keep her awake any longer, then you really need to go to sleep at 7pm as well. If your baby is not getting one long stretch of sleep, make a plan with your partner for nighttime tag team baby duty that allows you both to get some undisturbed sleep.

Sleep deprivation is believed to be a contributing factor to postpartum depression. This can quickly become a vicious cycle as once postpartum depression or anxiety surfaces, you may find you cannot sleep even when the baby is sleeping (insomnia is a common side effect of postpartum depression). Try to be proactive as the effects of sleep deprivation can take a while to feel: By the time you realize you are exhausted, you are beyond exhausted. The more sleep you can manage to muster, the more quickly you will recover and refuel your tank.

- **Physical Activity**

Having a baby is an extremely taxing event and it will take some time to fully recover. Most women find that their level of energy comes in spurts, especially in the first few weeks. One moment, you will be feeling completely exhausted. The next moment, the adrenaline and excitement of the new baby will kick back in and you can feel like a million bucks. The trick is to be overly conscious to not do too much in those high energy moments. Even though you feel good, your body is still recovering. If you push too hard and do too much, you will often find yourself far more exhausted and sore the next day. This will be especially challenging to moderate if you have other young children at home, but you will need to find some way to let your body rest.

When thinking about what level of physical activity is appropriate, consider “the Rule of 3”. For the first 3 days after having your baby, you really should not leave bed (other than to use the bathroom and gently stretch). You definitely will want to avoid using stairs and should not leave home (other than your trip home if you have had your baby at a hospital or birth center). If you can rest well with your baby in bed with you, the 3 days of skin-to-skin contact will also help your milk to come in and your baby to master nursing. If you cannot rest with baby, have your partner take her while you sleep and bring her back when she needs to eat. At night, your baby can be in bed with you or in a bassinet or co-sleeper next to your bed so that you do not have to get up every time he needs to be fed. Ask your partner to handle diaper changes and help to get baby back to sleep after nursing. The only thing you should be doing for the first 3 days is feeding yourself and your baby, and resting together. Many women actually find they need even more than 3 days resting in bed. Basically, you will want to spend as much time in bed as possible until your cramping has subsided, your bleeding has slowed to spotting, and your milk has come in. Generally, this takes 3-5 days, and so 3 is truly a minimum.

After these first few days, if you feel ready to be up and moving around more, try to do so within the house as much as possible for the next 3 weeks. This doesn’t mean you cannot go out, and if you have older children staying home exclusively for 3 weeks is probably not even possible. But, this is not the time for planning big trips, all day activities or running lots of
errands that you do not absolutely need to run. Before leaving the house it is helpful to check in with yourself and ask “Do I really need to do this right now?” If not, reevaluate the plan. If it is something that will be relaxing and restorative (like meeting a good friend for tea) then go for it. If it something that will take energy, refrain. If it is something that will stress you or deplete you, definitely avoid at all costs! This is the time to ask for help. Use the freezer meals you have prepared or allow your friends and family to help prepare some meals for you. Take it easy, stick close to home, and bond with your baby. Give yourself permission to let the house be dirty and the laundry to pile up. You do not have to be Super Mom, and it will truly serve you best if you do not try to be. Women who struggle with postpartum depression typically begin experiencing symptoms 1-2 weeks after baby is born. One reason some women seem to develop postpartum depression and/or anxiety is from trying to do too much in these first weeks. (We will discuss postpartum depression and anxiety more fully below). If you are vigilant in taking your 3 weeks of rest, you will find yourself with far more gas in the tank for the long haul. If you suddenly begin having a lot of vaginal bleeding again or your pain gets worse within this time frame, it is a good indication that you are doing too much physical activity.

In addition, keep in mind that in the early weeks of your newborn’s life, your baby’s immune system is extremely immature and she is still mastering the art of breastfeeding. Keeping her close to home will protect her and allow her to focus on bonding with you and developing her nursing skills. Taking a daily, slow and gentle walk around your neighborhood is a good idea, however. You and your baby will benefit from the fresh air. And, you are less likely to develop symptoms of “cabin fever” if you have some outside time.

Once you hit your 3 week mark, you can allow yourself to be more active as long as you are feeling ready and up to it. You may have some cabin fever and be ready to get out and socialize or even get a bit of exercise. But, you will still be recovering and refueling for quite some time. Exactly how long this will take depends on how well you are taking care of yourself, especially when it comes to nutrition and sleep, as well as the circumstances of your delivery. Some women are anxious to get back into shape and loose the body weight, or resume pre-pregnancy exercise and activity they used to enjoy. It is so important to not push this within the first 3 months. First, your internal organs were dramatically stretched and repositioned during pregnancy. It takes time for them to go back to where they should be and high impact exercise will prolong this internal work. Second, your body is really working with your baby in the first 3 months to establish your milk supply. Women who push too hard in this time period often struggle with milk production and can end up unable to nurse for as long as they had hoped for. A good way to moderate is to simply resume a level of physical exercise that was appropriate during your pregnancy, possibly even less. Walking, swimming, gentle yoga and pilates are great choices for exercise in this 3 month recovery period.

The first 3 months is also a sensitive time for your baby. The first 3 months of a newborn’s life is sometimes referred to as the 4th trimester. Ideally, your baby would stay in utero for 12 months, but in order for their growing head to be able to make it out of your body safely, we are
designed to birth after only 9 months. You will notice that during the first 3 months, your baby will spend a lot of time sleeping. There will be a dramatic increase of awareness once he hits the 3 months mark. In essence, he is still in a period of incubation for the first 3 months. The more you can do to create a “womb-like” environment for your baby, the more content she will be. If you are pushing your baby too hard to be out in the world and active with you, it can be too overwhelming. Some babies will react by being overly fussy and will struggle to sleep well. Other babies will force their senses to shut down when they are feeling overwhelmed. You do not want this either as this is a critically important time for your baby’s sensory development.

In truth, the Rule of 3 is an absolute minimum guideline for rest and recovery. Ideally, it would be a Rule of 6! However, your life circumstances may simply not allow for that. Many women will have to go back to work and are lucky if they can even take 3 months off. Do your best to at least follow the Rule of 3 and restrain yourself from pushing beyond those guidelines even when you feel fantastic. Feeling fantastic is a good sign that you are taking care of yourself and you want to continue to do so in order for that fantastic to last long term.

If you have had a particularly complicated pregnancy, especially difficult labor and/or a Cesarean birth, then the Rule of 3 really should double to a Rule of 6: 6 days in bed, 6 weeks home, 6 months of light low-impact physical exercise only. This may seem like a very long time, but it will go by faster than you think!

It may take some time to adjust and become comfortable with your body after having a baby. Remind yourself that it took 9 months to put on the weight; it will likely take at least this long to lose it again. Try to focus on your health more so than your appearance. Losing the baby weight slow and steady will be far better for your health than an aggressive exercise regimen, which will exhaust and deplete you.

- **Structural Integration and BodyTalk:**
  If you have been receiving structural integration body work and/or BodyTalk, these modalities can also assist in your postpartum recovery. These therapies can address structural damage caused from labor (prolapsed uterus, pelvic floor damage or weakness, strain to the lower back and tail bone) as well as assist with any hormonal imbalances, postpartum depression or anxiety, insomnia, nerve damage, or bladder incontinence. At the end of your pregnancy, your body produces high levels of the hormone Relaxin, which allows the joints of your pelvis to relax and spread. However, this hormone relaxes and mobilizes all of the joints in your body and can leave you with misalignments anywhere after your baby has been born. Structural integration after childbirth can help to get your body back in comfortable alignment.

- **For Partners:**
  Anyone living in the same house as a newborn is likely to experience some level of sleep deprivation. If your baby is in the same room as you, or if you are assisting your partner with nighttime care, you too can suffer from exhaustion. Since you may be robbed of sleep, it will be
just as important that you too are compensating by taking excellent care of yourself. Eating well should be something you and your partner do together.

Your role as a supporting partner does not end with your baby’s birth. Your partner has gone through an intense physical, mental and emotional chore. The hormones and excitement can give your partner sudden bursts of energy. But, if she does too much she will likely take far longer to fully heal. Do your best to pick up the slack around the house. Try to handle all of the food preparation and necessary household chores for at least one week. Lend a hand with nighttime care as much as possible, and try to work out a way for your partner to get some uninterrupted sleep. Be sure there is plenty to eat in the house and help her to stay hydrated and nourished as she recovers.

It will also be your job to facilitate visitations. If your partner feels up to company, be sure to kindly let them know when it is time to go so that your partner and baby can rest. Labor is often mentally and emotionally (and sometimes even physically!) taxing for partners as well; so you will need some rest too!

PAIN MEDICATIONS

Women will experience different levels of pain or discomfort following childbirth. Your level will certainly be influenced by the type of labor and delivery you had. While you do not want to suffer through excruciating pain, some level of discomfort is actually a good thing. If you use medication to fully mask your pain, you will be tricked into believing you can do more physically than you really should be doing. Pain will give you an indication of how healed you are and guide you to rest when you need to rest. Therefore, we do recommend first trying the suggestions above to reduce your postpartum discomforts naturally. However, if you find your pain level is intolerable even with the above suggestions, you may need additional relief from pain medication. (As mentioned above, you will require relief from pain medications if you have had a Cesarean birth).

In addition to the suggestions provided above, homeopathic remedies can significantly assist with your healing process and can offer great pain relief. The great thing about trying homeopathic remedies is that they cannot cause any harm, but they might help you a lot! There are common remedies used to relieve postpartum pain: they are listed and described in your index (F). These remedies can be found in most natural grocery stores or on-line. They are typically sold in doses of 30c or 200c: either is acceptable.

If the homeopathic remedies still do not offer you the pain relief you require, we recommend Acetaminophen (name brand, Tylenol). This is your best option for over-the-counter pain medication.

We strongly discourage the use of anti-inflammatory drugs (ibuprofen, aspirin, naproxen). Pregnancy and childbirth strain the ligaments throughout your pelvis causing some degree of inflammation. But,
contrary to popular belief, the inflammatory process is actually an important part of healing. When this process is interrupted with anti-inflammatory medications, the ligaments do not heal properly. It is observed that ligaments will have too much laxity when the inflammation process is disturbed. This can lead to long term pain or discomfort in the joints. It will be important to allow your body to fully heal after childbirth and so anti-inflammatory medications are strongly discouraged.

*This insert is a portion of a chapter from Thriving Pregnancy “Labor, Birth and Postpartum Recovery: A guide for nourishing yourself and your baby in the final weeks of pregnancy; building confidence and readiness for labor; and preparing for a healthy birth and postpartum recovery.” This is intended for personal reading only and may not be copied or reproduced without permission from author.