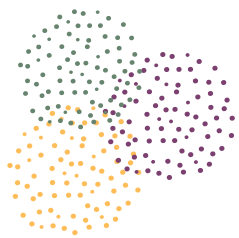


# postpartum guide



ithaca  
doula  
collective

nutrition • sleep • feeding • baby wearing • cord care  
emotional support • physical healing • managing older children



# Welcome!

This guide was compiled by the Ithaca Doula Collective to be a resource for pregnancy and labor support during the Covid-19 global pandemic when physical doula and practitioner access may be restricted due to distancing and quarantine. However, the majority of this information is applicable at all times. Resources can be found on the last page, and you are always welcome to visit our website or contact us directly for more information.

[www.IthacaDoulaCollective.com](http://www.IthacaDoulaCollective.com)

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## Nutrition

Adequate nourishment is one of the most important things to consider when recovering from childbirth and beginning the parenthood journey. Sleep is compromised and it will be tempting to reach for sugar and caffeine, but this leads to major crashing that affects mood and energy levels greatly. Here are some tips to keep yourself well fed in the postpartum time:

- **Plan ahead:** batch cook and freeze some of your favorite soups, stews and casseroles at the end of your pregnancy. It may sound simple, but this will be a life-saver sooner than you think.
- **One-handed snacks:** it's physiologically normal for your baby to want to be held constantly. In this scenario, you'll want to be able to grab things that are easily accessible with one hand. This includes hard boiled eggs, cut up veggies dipped in hummus, fruits such as grapes, apple slices, or peaches, and sliced cheeses and meats.
- **Throw normal meal times out the window:** babies feed around the clock, which means you might be starving at 3am and fast asleep while everyone else eats breakfast. Follow your body's cues.
- **Stay hydrated with lots of water and herbal teas.** Strive for at least 2 liters of water every day, possibly more (especially if breastfeeding). If you like tea, you can steep a quart of nourishing herbal infusions (such as red raspberry leaf or nettle) overnight, then strain and drink the following day.
- **Focus on consuming vegetables, healthy proteins and fats for sustained energy,** including meat, leafy greens, nuts/nut butters, broths, and coconut oil. Now is not the time to restrict calories, especially if breastfeeding. Nutrient-dense foods help to encourage tissue repair and healing throughout the body.
- **Make sure you eat foods high in fiber (at least 20–35 grams/day), to avoid constipation** which is especially helpful if you've had a vaginal birth, but also supportive for those healing from cesarean births.
- **Partner and family support:** it's extremely helpful if foods can be prepared and served (and sometimes even fed) to the new parent who's recovering and perhaps breastfeeding. During times of Covid-19, this might be limited to just the partner, if anyone at all. In normal circumstances, this is an excellent job for the new grandparents, aunts/uncles, or close friends. Meal trains or sending take-out, groceries, or gift cards to restaurants is an incredibly useful gift to a new family.

## Sleep

We all know babies need lots of sleep to grow and develop, but sleep for new parents is extremely important as well!

Newborns feed at least every 3 hours but often in the beginning it's much more frequent. Not to mention, by the time you feed your baby, change them, burp them, and rock them back to sleep, you sometimes find yourself with less than an hour to rest before they're hungry again! This can be overwhelming for many new families. Here are some tips to navigate your own sleep:

- **Stay in or on or near the bed!** Some people like to follow the “5-5-5” rule: the first five days in the bed, the next five days on the bed, and the following 5 days near the bed. This will help you recuperate after the birth and get you the rest you need, no matter what time of day.

- **Partner support:** not everyone has a partner, but if you do then teamwork can ensure you both get enough rest. For a breastfeeding parent, it can be helpful if your partner handles all the things that happen during night feedings besides the actual feeding- which can include changing diapers and clothes, swaddling, and soothing. For bottle feeding parents, alternating which parent takes feedings can be super helpful. Note: to maintain adequate supply and prevent engorgement, the lactating parent should be emptying the breasts (either by feeding, pumping, or hand expressing) at least every 3 hours or if they feel hard and full.

- **Naps are your best friend.** Most people get their sleep at night only, but as a new parent it's critical to be able to rest at other times of the day. In fact, newborns tend to get their best sleep in the late mornings and afternoons. It might take getting used to daytime sleeping, but it will be life-saving once you do. If you struggle, try black-out curtains, white noise, eye masks, and avoiding caffeine.

- **Keep baby in your room at night.** Currently the AAP does not recommend bed sharing with your infants, but they do recommend keeping your baby in your bedroom for the first 6 months. Not only does this reduce the risk of SIDS, but it saves you time and energy at night when you likely just want to feed and get back to sleep without moving too far from bed. Look into bassinets that are meant to go right next to the bed or even attach to it.

## Creating your "Nest"

You will likely spend most of your day under a baby. To make this easier, create a station or “nest”, one in your bedroom and one in a family space. Here are a few ideas to create a supportive set-up:

- **Use a basket or tote:** this will allow you to keep all of your essentials in one place, and you can easily move it from one location to another. Some people prefer to have two separate setups.
- Before sitting down, make sure that you have:** a fresh cup of water or tea, a one-handed snack, and a charger for your phone.
- **Other helpful items include:** a book or magazine, headphones to listen to podcasts or audiobooks, nail clippers for the babe (it tends to be best to clip their nails while they're sleeping), a hot pack for your shoulders, a pillow to prop under your arm as you hold the babe, and a place to prop up your feet.
- **Changing station:** whether it's an actual changing table or at least the supplies, not having to go more than a few feet from your nest to change your babe will make a world of difference.
- **Most importantly,** pee before you sit down

## Your Physical Healing

You've just completed a huge physical feat and your body needs rest and recovery time. **See the suggested "5-5-5" rule above in regards to sleep/rest.** In the first, week limit trips up and down the stairs - and if you can stay on one level altogether that's even better!

**Lochia** is the normal vaginal discharge after birth which can continue for 30-40 days. The normal progression is from rubra - bright red like a period, to serosa - more pinkish, to alba - a white discharge. If you begin to have bright red bleeding after it has changed color, it can mean you are being too physically active and that you need more rest.

**If you have concern about your discharge,** an increase in bleeding, a change in color back to bright red, clots of a fist size or more, bleeding that fully saturates a pad within an hour, or discharge accompanied by a foul smell, please reference the normal guidelines given to you by your provider and contact them with any questions.

### **Recommendations to support perineum healing after a vaginal birth:**

- Rinse using a peri squirt bottle (which the hospital typically provides) during urination. You can fill it with warm water or with an herbal tea (see the link to a recipe on our resource page)
- Use a sitz bath 1-2x/day during the first week or two (see sitz bath links on resource page)
- Change your pad regularly
- If you have ongoing discomfort or concerns, we recommend seeing a pelvic floor physical therapist (see contacts for this service on our resource page)

### **Recommendations for healing after a cesarean birth:**

- Limit carrying anything heavier than the weight of your baby for the first 2 weeks
- Try to limit climbing up and down the stairs more than once a day for the first week or two (creating two "nests" can be helpful in this scenario)
- Use a heating pad and/or alternate pain relievers (Tylenol and ibuprofen) regularly to manage your pain for the first 10-14 days. Setting an alarm to remind you to take your next dose is often helpful.

If you notice any increased pain, redness, or oozing from your incision (or if you're having a fever) call your provider to assess whether or not a visit is recommended.

## **Feeding**

### **Breastfeeding**

#### *The 5 Cardinal Rules of Establishing a Good Supply of Breast Milk*

- 1.) Frequent Nursing:** You will likely nurse 8-12 times in a day (24 hours) during the first two weeks, which often looks like every 2-4 hours. The amount of milk you produce is directly related to the frequency and efficiency of suckling at the breast.
- 2.) Adequate Fluid Intake:** It is not necessary to force fluids, however a nursing parent does need plenty of fluids. You can easily become dehydrated if you forget to drink water or tea with every feed. One way to assess your hydration level is to look at your urine. If it's a pale yellow, you're likely good to go!
- 3.) Adequate Rest:** It is very important for you to rest. This cannot be overstated. Resting when the baby sleeps, or at the least lying down often during the day, is imperative for the long-haul.
- 4.) Adequate and Balanced Diet:** What you put into your body for fuel is just as important while breastfeeding as it was while pregnant. Care should be taken not to miss meals.
- 5.) Relaxation During Feedings:** Breastfeeding is enhanced if you're comfortable and relaxed. Tension may inhibit the letdown reflex, so be sure to find a comfortable position, supported by pillows, and use a hot pack on your neck or shoulders as needed.

**Sore (or cracked) nipples are often the result of an improper or inefficient latch.** We suggest connecting with one of the local lactation consultant resources (listed at the end of this guide) for support. To help relieve sore or cracked nipples, alternate sides with each feeding and apply expressed breastmilk to the nipples after each feeding, allowing them to air dry.

## Bottle Feeding

Many families who are breastfeeding also use bottles at some point, whether it's to supplement with formula or allow another family member to feed the baby pumped milk. Here are some tips for smooth bottle feeding, regardless of the source:

- **Know when to introduce the bottle if you're also breastfeeding:** This will vary from family to family. Generally, bottle feeding is not recommended in the very early days if you are trying to establish a solid latch and milk supply. If supplementation of pumped milk or formula is necessary, there are other options that work well for brand new babies, such as spoon and syringe feeding, or a supplemental nursing system (SNS). This can help the baby avoid nipple confusion or bottle preference, which can interfere with breastfeeding during the first few weeks. That being said, most babies can take a bottle here and there while still figuring out breastfeeding, even if there is some struggle initially - so don't stress if you need a break!
- **Types of bottles:** There are so many to choose from! Generally, if a family is wanting there to be a smooth transition between feeding from the breast and bottle, it is wise to choose a bottle that has a slower flow and mimics the shape of the breast as much as possible. Some favorites include Dr. Brown's and Comotomo (see resource section for links). Whether you're exclusively bottle feeding or using it as a supplemental source, we recommend trying a couple options and seeing what works best for your baby.
- **Paced Bottle Feeding:** This is a method for bottle feeding a newborn that promotes slower transfer of milk to baby which can decrease digestive upset or frequent spitting up. Watch the video in our resource section to learn more.

## Cluster Feeding

As mentioned earlier, it's normal for your babe to eat every 2-3 hours, which equates to about 8-12 feedings in one 24-hour period. However, you may notice that your babe wants to eat every 30 minutes or so for a handful of hours each day. This is called "cluster feeding".

- **Growth Spurts:** It's normal for cluster feeding to begin around 2-3 weeks when the first growth spurt tends to occur. When this happens, the more frequent feedings encourage your body to produce more milk if you're breastfeeding. This increased production tends to correlate with a growth spurt and may last for a few days. Developmental growth spurts tend to occur around weeks 2-3, 6 weeks, 3 months, and 6 months old.
- **Tanking up:** Sometimes a cluster feed is just your baby increasing its caloric intake before a longer stretch of sleep (typically this cluster feeding happens in the evening, but not always). Follow your baby's lead with their hunger cues, even if it's been less than 2 hours since their last feed. They may know something you don't know.

- **Call in the reinforcements:** Cluster feeding, especially when it happens for a series of days, can be exhausting for the person who's offering the feeding. If you begin to see a pattern with feeds clustering together, try to take advantage of a nap an hour or two before that timeframe tends to begin. Having your "nest" prepared with plenty of fluids and nutrient-dense foods is also very helpful during this time.

## Managing Older Children

It can be challenging for toddlers and older children to welcome in a new addition to the family. Attention inevitably gets shifted to the newborn and this can leave older children feeling neglected and jealous. During this time of Covid- 19, utilizing daycares and care from other family members may not be possible. Here are some tips to navigate:

- **Include the older child as much as possible.** This can look like allowing them to assist with diaper changes, bringing you supplies, and letting them love on their new baby sibling.

- **Nursing Basket:** Toddlers often get especially jealous of their new baby siblings when they are being nursed or fed. Put together a nursing basket, which can be a basket (or any container) filled with interesting toys and snacks that they can only use during feedings. This can help toddlers look forward to feeding times instead of resenting it.

- **One-on-one time:** As tired as you may be, try to spend at least 30 minutes/day with your older child(ren) while the baby sleeps. They will appreciate the individual attention and it will help them regain a sense of normalcy after their whole world has flipped upside down with the addition of the new baby.

- **Be easy on yourself.** If your toddler(s) end up watching more TV than usual, or have a meltdown every day for a week, that's ok. The important thing is getting through this time as smoothly as possible and there's no such thing as a perfect parenting approach. Doing the best you can is more than enough.

## Colic

Sometimes it can be hard to know the difference between a baby who's having a hard time ("fussing") and a baby with colic. During the first 3 months, babies generally cry a lot more often than any other time. There is a light at the end of the tunnel, we promise! However, babies who are experiencing colic tend to have patterns in their crying spells. Typically, colicky babies cry inconsolably for longer periods of time (1-3 hours) around the same time of day (often in the evening, but not always).



Here are some signs that might indicate that your baby is experiencing colic:

- Baby is healthy, eating and growing well, but cries in spells
- Has a high-pitched cry or scream for extended periods of time
- May have a red face or pale skin around the mouth
- May arch their back, stiffen their arms, clench their fists, and/or pull their legs in

If it's clear that your baby is well fed (and gaining appropriate weight), has a clean diaper, and does not have a fever, diarrhea, or a difference in temperament throughout the day, your baby's crying spells may be due to colic. We encourage you to make an appointment with your pediatrician to rule out any other causes of these intense crying spells.

### **What causes colic?**

Scientists and doctors are not sure what causes colic. Some theories include digestive upset, possibly due to food sensitivities (either in the breastfeeding parent's diet or due to the ingredients in the formula) or digestive development that causes more gas. Unfortunately, the intense crying spells can also cause the baby to swallow more air, making gas more pronounced. Burping more frequently throughout a feeding, using the paced-bottle feed, and burping or gently massaging the baby's stomach while upright after a feed may help to reduce gas-related pains. Another theory for the possible cause of colic is a nervous system response. Some babies get overstimulated by their environments easily, especially during the first few months of their lives as they adapt to the outside world. Using dim lights, gentle sounds (whether that's calming music or a white-noise machine), carriers, gentle swaying movements, and/or swaddling can help to reduce overstimulation of the nervous system.

Most babies grow out of their colicky phases within 3 months, but some may last as long as 9. Calling in the reinforcements is often necessary for families with colicky babies. While community support is limited during a global pandemic, it is important that you and your partner (if they are present) trade in and out of the "soothing" role. Even a 10-15 minute walk outside can help to reset your own nervous system. For more support and guidance navigating colic, please contact one of our local doulas who will be happy to help.

## **Tummy Time**

It is important to begin tummy time within the first few days at home. While it is recommended that babies sleep on their backs, it is also important for their physical and neurological development that they spend some awake time on their stomachs. Often, this looks like simply placing a blanket on the floor, getting down to their level, and talking to them as they explore the sensations of lying on their tummies. Newborns only need to experience this for a few minutes 2-3 times per week.

They will eventually work up to longer periods of time, multiple times per day. If your babe is very resistant to tummy time at first, you can lie down on your back and place your baby on your chest for a few minutes to give them a similar experience. Of course, make sure that both you and your baby are awake during this time.

## **Baby's Cord Care**

The baby's cord stump normally needs no special care. It should be clean and dry with no odor. If you do clean it, be very gentle and use only a mild soap. Take care to fold down the top of the diaper under the cord to allow air flow and to keep it dry. In 4-20 days the cord stump will completely dry and fall off, if the umbilicus is still slightly open at this time continue to keep it dry and uncovered until it completely heals.

## **Identifying Your Community Prior to Birth**

It's a good idea to identify a few people who you plan to reach out to in the days, weeks and months following your birth - this will help ensure that when you need support you know there are people you are comfortable reaching out to.

Who are your people that you can say, "Hey - I'm going to call on you to talk when I need someone", or ask them to please check in with you every \_\_ number of days during the first 6-8 weeks. If you have already made a plan it'll be easier to actually make the connection in the moment because you know they are there for you and ready to support as needed.

Knowing ourselves, and if we have tendencies to isolate when we're tired, going through transitions, or maybe not "feeling like ourselves" is important to identify beforehand. Putting plans in place to support ourselves ahead of time is essential to postpartum wellbeing.

## **Phone / Screentime**

This is especially challenging at the present time due to the physical distancing that is required of us with Covid-19. Being on the phone is a one-handed activity that keeps us feeling connected to the world while we integrate life with a new baby. It absolutely has its place and is important, especially right now. It is also important to acknowledge that it can drive us a little nuts and can feed into our fears or anxieties. Taking breaks from the phone/screen has big benefits too for both our sleep cycles and our nervous systems. Listening to a podcast or music can be a way to still be entertained while not having to look at the screen. If you see yourself struggling with putting the phone down or closing the computer, set some boundaries of times that you are not going to be using the phone, and try it out. It could look like a series of hours in the morning, in the middle part of the day, and in the evening. Once you break the cycle of being on your phone it's possible that you'll feel the freedom or shift in your nervous system and not turn back!

## Babywearing

During this time of a global pandemic, it is recommended to physically distance yourself from others and only go out when necessary. However, this does not mean you can't get fresh air in your yard or walk around your neighborhood. You can even walk with a friend if you choose a place to walk where they can be 6 ft away - rec trails and country roads are both good options!

When you don't want to fuss with a bulky stroller, wearing your baby in a carrier, wrap, or sling is a wonderful way to get exercise, breathe fresh air, and move while still keeping your baby close, warm and comfortable. This is often a great strategy within the home as well when your baby prefers to be held while sleeping. See our resource section for more information about babywearing.

## Additional Precautions during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Navigating public spaces and visitors can be challenging during the first few weeks and months of a baby's life, but when you add a pandemic into the mix, it can feel even more frightening. The good news is, the "fourth trimester" (the 3 months after a baby is born) is often a time of hibernation, and for good reason. Keep these suggestions in mind as you plan for the weeks and months ahead.

- **Your baby's immune system is still developing**, so reducing their (and your) exposure to the greater public is always advised.
- **Reduce contact with others who are not self-isolating:** While you and your baby may be staying close to home for the next few weeks, it's important that anyone else who comes in close contact with the babe has also been self-isolating for (at least) 3 weeks prior to their arrival with no symptoms of illness. According to Evidence Based Birth, a person can be contagious for up to 37 days from the time they pick up the virus.
- **Limit exposure to public places, including the grocery store.** Consider using a curb-side or delivery service for grocery shopping, or order food online. This might look like bulk orders of non-perishable foods, produce services, or meal programs. Local CSA's with no-contact pick-up or delivery services can also help to reduce the number of hands touching your food, by reducing transportation and packaging.
- **If your partner needs to come and go from the house**, they can decrease the likelihood of bringing viruses into your home by washing their hands for 20 seconds immediately upon returning to the house, disinfecting door knobs and surfaces regularly, and using hand sanitizer between any locations while they're out of the house.

- **If one of your family members becomes ill**, it is best that they isolate themselves from you and the baby while they're symptomatic. This may be challenging if they are your child. You can talk to your pediatrician about their suggested protocol, as well as the proper timing for reintroducing yourself and the baby to that family member after they stop showing symptoms of an illness.

- **If you become ill**, it's important that you remain with your baby, but reduce the likelihood of passing along your illness. This means that you should wash your hands before and after handling the baby and wear a mask to reduce the likelihood of transmission.

- **Breastfeeding:** According to the World Health Organization, it is encouraged that an infected parent continues to breast/chestfeed as it will help to build your baby's immune system and maintain your milk supply.

- **If you're pumping**, wash your hands before and after handling the equipment and sterilize the equipment after every use.

- **If you're bottle feeding**, wash your hands before and after handling the baby, or ask a family member to feed the baby. Again, sterilize the bottles after every use.

- **Skin to skin contact is still advised for baby and parent** (even if they test positive for COVID-19), but should be done with proper precautions.

As always, talk to your midwife, OB, or pediatrician if you have any questions or suspect that yourself or a family member may be ill.



## Resources

### **Mealtrain options**

<https://www.mealtrain.com>

<https://www.bringthenameal.com>

### **Produce delivery options**

<https://www.misfitsmarket.com>

<https://www.imperfectfoods.com>

### **Delivery meal service (Ithaca)**

<https://www.roseshomedish.com>

### **The First Forty Days: The Essential Art of a Nourishing the New Mother by Heng Ou**

<https://www.alibris.com/The-First-Forty-Days-The-Essential-Art-of-Nourishing-the-New-Mother-Heng-Ou/book/33543923?matches=20>

### **Herbal Baths for Postpartum Healing**

<https://avivaromm.com/postpartum-herb-baths/>

### **Lactation Support**

Latching Lounge at Jillian's Drawers -

<https://jilliansdrawers.com/pages/ithacaclasses>

La Leche League - <https://www.facebook.com/LLLOfIthaca/>

Rebecca Costello, IBCLC - <https://intheowlactation.com/>

Summer Killian, IBCLC - <https://www.ithacaibclc.com>

Shanna Jesch, IBCLC - <https://www.shannajesch.com>

### **Bottles**

<https://www.drbrownsbaby.com/Comotomo-bottles> -

<http://www.comotomo.com/portfolio/babybottle/>

### **Paced bottle feeding video**

[https://m.youtube.com/watch?fbclid=IwAR2uOZO-](https://m.youtube.com/watch?fbclid=IwAR2uOZO-sE6Co7ULbnRlla_HgugffxTcZ4vbHTdDs9pMmsZX1mesyE9dFqU&v=TuZXD1hIW8Q)

[sE6Co7ULbnRlla\\_HgugffxTcZ4vbHTdDs9pMmsZX1mesyE9dFqU&v=TuZXD1hIW8Q](https://m.youtube.com/watch?fbclid=IwAR2uOZO-sE6Co7ULbnRlla_HgugffxTcZ4vbHTdDs9pMmsZX1mesyE9dFqU&v=TuZXD1hIW8Q)

## **Pelvic Floor Support**

Trumble Physical Therapy: [www.trumblephysicaltherapy.com](http://www.trumblephysicaltherapy.com)

Claire Agrawal (Cayuga Medical): [www.cayugamed.org/doctor/claire-agrawal-pt-dpt-prpc-csrs/](http://www.cayugamed.org/doctor/claire-agrawal-pt-dpt-prpc-csrs/)

## **Babywearing video**

<https://www.lli.org/breastfeeding-info/baby-wearing/>

## **Sitz bath resources**

<https://www.walgreens.com/store/c/walgreens-sitz-bath/ID=prod6178852-product>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5RHKjzskbFU>

<https://avivaromm.com/postpartum-herb-baths/>

## **Virtual Community Support**

IDC Postpartum Families Zoom -

<https://www.facebook.com/events/1842291912574543/>

Child Development Council Postpartum Depression Zoom -

<https://www.facebook.com/events/1402973633192914/>

