

Postpartum Physical Wellness

We learned about the postpartum physical recovery earlier in the program. Postpartum physical wellness encompasses some of that knowledge but goes further into nutrition, healing and exercise to facilitate full postpartum healing. As postpartum doulas we are not healthcare providers, nutritionists, or fitness experts, but we can provide support and information regarding general postpartum wellness. We encourage our clients to make healthy choices and



follow any instructions provided by their healthcare providers. Some sections of this topic are links. These provide you with additional knowledge and also serve as a resource that you can share with your clients.

Exercise and Physical Activity

Mothers need to follow their hospital discharge instructions or their healthcare provider's recommendations. Some women are instructed to take it easy and use the stairs no more than once a day for the first week. Others receive very little instruction regarding limiting physical activity. Encourage clients to listen to their bodies. If lochia bleeding or pain increases, they might need to lower their physical activity level. If mom needs to continue taking pain medications she should remember that her body is still healing and the absence of discomfort is due to the medication.

Some women may feel anxious about returning to exercise or shedding the weight they have gained during pregnancy. Remind them that pregnancy is a nine-month journey and recovery takes time. The body is also designed to keep some extra weight as stores for breastfeeding. Reminders of good posture and strengthening their abdominals, pelvic floor, and leg muscles, can help with back pain that many mothers experience. Working out too early, especially after a cesarean, can prolong healing time or cause injury.

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/labor-and-delivery/in-depth/exercise-after-pregnancy/art-20044596> – information about postpartum exercise

Even moderate exercise, such as walking, is beneficial for postpartum women both physically and emotionally. Outdoor walks can provide fresh air, vitamin D and feel good hormones from being active. Postpartum yoga and Pilates are low impact and can target the muscles commonly weakened and strained from pregnancy. Mommy and baby yoga can be extremely beneficial as it encourages physical activity, bonding and provides an opportunity for mom to socialize with women in a similar stage of motherhood.

Nutrition

Hydration and adequate nutrition are crucial to postpartum healing and breastfeeding. While breast milk contains excellent nutrition for the baby, even though his mother's diet may not be as healthy as it should be, she herself will be left feeling drained and unwell if she lacks good nutritional intake. Poor nutrition during the postpartum period can also cause the mother to feel emotionally unwell. It is easy

to forget self-care while caring for a dependent newborn. Encourage parents to discuss a healthy diet with their care providers if they have nutritional concerns.

In general, postpartum mothers need adequate calories, healthy fats, protein and micro-nutrients. It will vary depending on the mother's health, but many sources suggest breastfeeding mothers need an additional 3500 calories over their pre-pregnancy caloric intake. However, new mothers should not be too preoccupied with counting calories. A simple suggestion is reminding the mother to eat and drink to hunger and thirst while making nutrient dense choices. A simple way to stay hydrated is to drink water every time the baby is nursing.

Following the suggestions in *Common Sense Nutrition* can help anyone eat more healthfully. Make a copy and give to your clients for them to hang on their refrigerators or bulletin boards for easy reference.

A GUIDE TO COMMON SENSE NUTRITION

By Horatio Daub MD and Cathy Daub PT

FRESH STATE: Nutritional value is greatest when food is consumed closest to its natural fresh state

Overcooking/reheating food depletes them of their nutritional value and life giving energy. Every step of transporting, processing or packaging food has an impact on its nutritional value. It is wise to avoid highly processed foods that have no resemblance to the original foods they were made from i.e. chips and fries.

COMPLEX CARBOHYDRATES: Choosing complex carbohydrates (whole grains & foods) rather than refined carbohydrates (sugars and refined starches), benefits health

Read labels and avoid buying and eating foods where sugar (especially refined) or refined white flour (wheat, rice, or semolina) is one of the first few ingredients.

FIBER: High fiber foods have multiple health benefits

Fiber helps food to pass through the digestive system quickly. A diet high in meat, which has little fiber, and low in fresh fruits and vegetables, is not as healthy, especially for the colon and bowel.

QUANTITY: Moderation of the quantity of foods eaten is necessary for optimal health.

One should eat only when hungry and until hunger is satisfied. A distinction must be made between appetite and real hunger. Balance is the key to health. When the stomach is 2/3 full, it is better able to digest food and therefore the body obtains more nutritional benefit.

LOWER IN FATS: Choosing foods lower in fats (especially saturated fats) enhances health

A certain amount of good quality fats such as olive oil, oils of nuts and certain seeds, and fish are good for the body. Foods that are deep fat fried or contain hydrogenated and trans fats, have an adverse effect on the body and a growing baby. Check food labels and avoid buying foods with hydrogenated or partially

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES: Choosing fresh fruits and vegetables benefits health and well-being

These foods are high in fiber, vitamins, minerals and trace minerals. The more green the leafy vegetable, the higher the nutritional value. Broccoli is a powerhouse of nutrition especially when eaten raw or lightly steamed.



LOWER ON FOOD CHAIN: Eating foods lower on the food chain and washing all produce can decrease exposure to pesticides, toxins, and bacteria.

Toxins and pesticides are concentrated in the fatty tissues of animals and fish that eat plants and plankton or other animals. The lower the foods are in the food chain, the closer they are to the sun which is the source of the energy that goes into the foods.

VITAMIN D AND CALCIUM: Getting adequate Vitamin D and Calcium and avoiding excess risk of osteoporosis

Vitamin D is synthesized by the skin when we're exposed to sunlight during certain times of the day and year, and can also be found in a limited number of natural and fortified foods sources. Vitamin D aids in the absorption of calcium, and vitamin D is essential for bone, teeth, muscle and immune system health. Vitamin D is fat soluble and so is stored in the body. Food is the best source of calcium with leafy greens and tofu being good sources. Dairy is not a good source of calcium for bone strength.

LABELS: Knowing how to read labels and selecting foods can benefit health and transform your shopping and eating.

The first item listed on a label is present in the greatest concentration. Look for the words, whole and organic (not refined or enriched) on the ingredient's list.

GMOs: Read current information on GMOs or transgenics (genetically engineered foods) and their harmful effects. Buy organic when possible.

PESTICIDES: Google *The Dirty Dozen* by the EWG (Environmental Working Group) who have identified the top 12 foods to buy organic due to high pesticide content. Following their recommendation, one can decrease pesticide consumption in foods by about 80%.

As a doula there are many things you can do to help mothers get adequate nutrition while they are still learning to balance self-care and caring for their new baby.

- Encourage the mother to have you or her partner set up nursing stations throughout her home that include water, a straw (it is hard to drink while nursing a newborn) and a nonperishable snack like a granola bar, nuts or dried fruit.
- Suggest the mother keep nonperishable snacks in her purse or diaper bag for when she is at appointments or running errands.
- Stock her fridge with high protein and easy to eat snacks/simple meals such as hard boiled eggs, sandwiches, grilled chicken for salads, chicken salad, etc.
- Have fruit and vegetables washed and prepped for quick access in the refrigerator.
- Keep soups, casseroles, pasta, and other easy to heat up leftovers stored in single portions in microwavable safe containers
- Have frozen fruit and fresh greens on hand for quick smoothies (be sure to have straws so she can easily drink while nursing). You or her partner can prepare these in advance and store in the refrigerator.
- Healthy high-fat foods such as avocados, nuts, salmon, chia seeds, and flaxseed meal are

necessary for healing and especially important while breastfeeding.

- Ask the family during your interview if they have any cultural or traditional foods they like to eat and respect their choices. For example, some cultures do not encourage anything but warm foods to be consumed during the postpartum period. If you have any questions always ask - do not assume.
- Some foods act as galactagogues (stimulate secretion of prolactin and resulting milk production) and support a good milk supply. Whole grains such as oats, nutritional yeast, flax seeds, pure maple syrup and some other foods are helpful. A simple breakfast of oatmeal with flax seeds and maple syrup as a sweetener can be helpful if the mother is concerned about supply.

Resources

<http://www.arhp.org/publications-and-resources/quick-reference-guide-for-clinicians/postpartum-counseling/diet> – remember that you are not a clinician, this is for informational purposes only

http://kellymom.com/bf/can-i-breastfeed/herbs/herbal_galactagogue/ &
<http://www.thekitchn.com/galactagogue-recipes-that-really-work-recipes-from-the-kitchn-211878>
information about galactagogues

Application and Understanding

1. Name three of the most important benefits of exercising especially in the postpartum period.
2. When is the best time to begin exercising after a vaginal birth? Cesarean birth?
3. What is the most important nutritional advice for healing that you can give a new mother, especially one who is breastfeeding and/or one who is feeling depressed.
4. Name three ways you can help to encourage healthy nutrition in the postpartum period.
5. How would you respond to a seven-day postpartum mom concerned about the extra remaining pounds following birth?

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