

Your Postpartum Guide

DOULA AT THE GATE • Recovery, rest, and real support for the fourth trimester

The first weeks after birth — often called the fourth trimester — are a season of healing, learning, and big feelings. Your body is recovering from one of the most demanding things it will ever do, your hormones are shifting, and you're getting to know a brand-new person. This guide walks you through what to expect, what to have ready, and where to turn for support.

What to Expect in the First Six Weeks

Bleeding (lochia): Heavier than a period at first, tapering over 4–6 weeks. Use pads, not tampons.

Afterpains: Cramping as your uterus shrinks back down, often stronger while nursing.

Soreness: Perineal tenderness after vaginal birth, or incision care after a cesarean.

Engorgement: Breasts may feel full and tender around days 3–5 as milk comes in.

Night sweats: Your body sheds extra fluid; this is normal in the first couple of weeks.

Big emotions: The 'baby blues' — weepiness, mood swings — are common in the first two weeks. Feelings that are intense, persistent, or getting worse deserve support (see resources).

Recovery Checklist — For You

- ☐ Maxi pads and comfortable high-waisted underwear
- ☐ Peri bottle (fill with warm water for bathroom trips)
- ☐ Witch hazel pads and ice packs for perineal relief
- ☐ Stool softener (ask your provider for a recommendation)
- ☐ Pain relief approved by your provider
- ☐ Easy snacks and a big water bottle within reach of your feeding spot
- ☐ Nursing pads, nipple cream, and a supportive bra
- ☐ Schedule your postpartum checkup (and a 1–2 week check if offered)

Support Checklist — Around the House

- ☐ Line up meals: freezer stash, meal train, or delivery gift cards
- ☐ Make a short list of tasks helpers can do (dishes, laundry, dog walks)

- ☐ Decide on visitor boundaries before baby arrives — and let your partner enforce them
- ☐ Set up a changing/feeding station on each floor you use
- ☐ Plan who's on call overnight for the first two weeks
- ☐ Put provider, pediatrician, and lactation contacts on the fridge

Call Your Provider Right Away If You Notice

Soaking a pad in an hour or passing large clots • Fever of 100.4°F or higher • Severe headache or vision changes • Pain, swelling, or redness in one leg • Chest pain or trouble breathing • Incision or tear that's increasingly red, warm, or draining • Thoughts of harming yourself or your baby — you deserve immediate, compassionate help and it is available (see resources below).

Resources & Support Lines

- **Postpartum Support International (PSI)**
Call or text the helpline at 1-800-944-4773 for help with postpartum depression, anxiety, and adjustment. Online support groups and local coordinator referrals at postpartum.net.
- **National Maternal Mental Health Hotline**
1-833-TLC-MAMA (1-833-852-6262). Free, confidential, 24/7 phone or text support for pregnant and postpartum moms, in English and Spanish.
- **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline**
Call or text 988 anytime for immediate crisis support.
- **La Leche League**
Breastfeeding information and mother-to-mother support; find local meetings and leaders at lalli.org.
- **Your pediatrician's nurse line**
Most practices have a 24/7 nurse line for newborn questions — save the number in your phone before delivery.
- **Doula at the Gate**
Postpartum visits, overnight support, feeding help, and a listening ear. Reach out anytime at www.doulaatthegate.com.

REMEMBER

Asking for help is not a detour from good mothering — it is good mothering.

This guide is for general information and does not replace medical advice from your provider.