

# Baby Care



# The Fourth Trimester

The “fourth trimester,” the 12 weeks immediately after giving birth, is just as important for mom and baby as the first three trimesters, Columbia University Irving Medical Center says.

But this is often a time when the new moms and babies have the least contact with their health care team.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) recommends moms have initial contact with their OB-GYN within three weeks of delivery and ongoing care as needed, with a comprehensive postpartum visit no later than 12 weeks after delivery. During the pregnancy, ACOG says, the health care team and the expectant mom should have a plan for the fourth trimester so mom and baby are better prepared when they go home.

## HEALING YOURSELF

Your body is still changing immediately after giving birth. It took nine months to get in to peak pregnancy condition; it's probably going to take at least that long to get back to your pre-pregnancy condition. Expect some bleeding postpartum. For vaginal deliveries, it can last up to four to six weeks. Use pads instead of tam-

pons during this time and pay attention to your pelvic floor. Leaking urine when you cough or sneeze is common but it should improve.

If you had a Cesarean section, remember that's a major surgery. Give yourself grace and time to recover. Keep your incision clean and avoid lifting anything heavier than your baby. Support your abdomen when coughing or laughing.

Gentle walking can help with your circulation.

## BABY CARE AND FEEDING

The fourth trimester is critical to establishing feeding routines, especially if mom is breastfeeding. A lactation consultant can help make sure both mom and baby are getting the nutrition they need and help with any breastfeeding issues.

Moms should still try to

rest as much as they can after delivering a baby. Instead of trying to squeeze in chores, nap when your baby naps. Ask your partner or a loved one to take nighttime feedings if you can so you can get more rest. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

## MENTAL HEALTH

It's normal to feel a little sadness or baby blues after giving birth as your hormones shift

and you're adapting to having a new baby. But if it lasts longer than a couple of weeks or it becomes overwhelming, mom may have postpartum depression and should get help immediately. Make sure mom and baby are eating well and healthily and, as soon as is possible, try to get some exercise as permitted by the doctor. Both of those things can help boost moods.



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# Bath Time for Baby

Nothing is as slippery as a wiggly, wet baby, and baby's first bath can be scary for everyone.

With a little practice, baby bath time can be a breeze and a great way to signal to baby that it's time to wind down and rest. Newborns do not need to bathe every day; three times a week might be enough. Too many baths can dry out baby's skin. Instead, aim for thorough diaper changes and clean up after meals. Pay attention to the folds of the baby's skin, including their thighs, groin, armpits and chin.

## SPONGE BATHS

From birth until the umbilical cord stump falls off, sponge baths are best for the baby, the American Academy of Pediatrics says. To give a sponge bath, choose a place that is warm with a flat surface. Pad hard surfaces with a blanket or towel. Gather your supplies, including a washcloth, a clean towel preferably with a built-in hood, fragrance-free baby shampoo and soap, baby wipes, a clean diaper and a change of clothes.

Spread out a towel or changing pad for your baby to lie on. Always keep one hand on your baby and, if you're using a changing table, use the safety strap as well. Run water into a basin or sink. Check the water temperature with your hand to



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make sure it's not too hot.

Take off the baby's clothes and diaper and wrap the baby in a towel. Uncover only the parts of the baby's body that you're washing. Wet the washcloth with warm water, wring it out and wipe the baby's face.

Wipe each eyelid from the inside corner to the outside corner. For the baby's body, use a damp washcloth dipped in plain or soapy water. Pay attention to creases under the arms, behind the ears and around the neck and diaper

area. Wash between baby's fingers and toes.

## TUB BATHS

Once the baby is old enough for a traditional bath, use a plastic baby tub or the sink in a warm room. No matter which

one you use, line it with a clean towel. Add about two inches of warm water to the sink or tub. Gather your bath supplies, along with a cup of rinsing water. Never leave the baby alone in the water and keep one hand on the baby at all times.

# How to Sleep Like a Baby

For new parents, it may seem like their baby never sleeps. But newborns usually get around 15 hours of sleep every 24 hours.

However, this is often broken up because their stomachs are too small to stay asleep that long. They wake up every two to three hours and need to eat. This is vastly different from the sleep schedule of most adults and can be a drain on energy and patience during the baby's first year.

## SLEEP TIPS

Quality sleep should be a priority for new parents. Sleeping can help fight postpartum depression and help bodies heal. Sleep can make parents feel like they're doing a better job at parenting and parents are likely to be more patient with the baby, with each other and with themselves.

Johns Hopkins offers these tips to make sure new parents are getting adequate rest:

- Sleep when the baby sleeps. If parents just try to sleep overnight, they're not going to get enough sleep. Instead, they should try to nap when the baby naps, even during the day. That can be hard, especially if there are other kids in the home, but do the best you can and don't be afraid to ask for help.



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- Place the crib near your bed. Having the crib or bassinet next to the bed makes it easier to tend to the baby and then go back to sleep. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends avoiding the temptation of co-sleeping. Grown-up bedding poses a suffocation risk.

- Practice good sleep hygiene by avoiding caffeine that can interfere with your sleep cycle. Avoid electronics before bed because the light from electronic devices can confuse your body clock. And, as absurd as it sounds, try to go to sleep and wake up at the same time every day.

## HELPING BABY SLEEP

Starting at around three months old, babies start sleeping for longer stretches, anywhere from four to six hours at a time. Help babies develop healthy sleep habits by putting babies down for the night when they're drowsy. Johns Hopkins recommends

not rocking the baby to sleep in your arms because this can become a habit. Babies need to learn to fall asleep on their own in their own bed. Don't pick up your baby immediately when they fuss, the hospital says, but give them some time so see if they can comfort themselves back to sleep on their own.

# What Is Kangaroo Care?

Kangaroo care is also known as skin-to-skin contact.

It's the practice of holding a diaper-clad baby upright on the parent's bare chest to help regulate the infant's temperature, stabilize their heart rate and breathing, encourage breastfeeding and promote healthy brain development.

In particular, the Cleveland Clinic says, kangaroo care has medical benefits for babies with a low birth weight and babies that are born preterm.

## KANGAROO CARE IN THE HOSPITAL

Most hospitals allow for kangaroo care, even when the baby needs special care in the NICU. Talk to your medical team about how long you can hold your baby pursuant to their medical needs and let you know how kangaroo care can happen even if baby has IVs or other medical equipment.

Other people can participate in kangaroo care, not just mom. Fathers, other family members and even trained volunteers can all give a baby some skin-to-skin time.

## HOW DO I DO KANGAROO CARE?

You can get started with kangaroo care at the hospital but then continue it at home. To practice kangaroo care, dress comfortably in something that opens easily in the front. Women may need to

remove their bra. Place the baby, clad only in a diaper or maybe with a hat and socks if it's chilly, in an upright position with their head resting to one side against your chest.

Once you're settled in, drape a blanket over your baby's back to keep them warm and comfortable. You can use

a wrap to secure your baby against your chest. Now, try to relax. Breathe normally. Stay awake for safety's sake, but the baby can nap. Avoid playing with them or rousing their attention. The Cleveland Clinic says the best times for skin-to-skin time are early in the morning or after you give

the baby a bath.

## WHAT TO AVOID DURING KANGAROO CARE

There are some things you shouldn't do during kangaroo care, including falling asleep, as tempting as it may be. Put away your phone or other electronic devices as they

can distract your focus away from your baby. Make sure your skin is clean and healthy and don't use any perfumes or lotions. Don't do skin-to-skin contact if you have a rash, open cuts or cold sores. Don't smoke before or during kangaroo care and avoid it if you're sick.



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# Diaper Rash Tips and Tricks

Diaper rash is a common but stubborn skin infection that happens in the baby's diaper area.

Also called diaper dermatitis, it typically presents as patches of inflamed, red or pink skin. It can be caused by chafing and sensitive skin or by diapers that aren't changed often enough.

## SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of diaper rash include inflamed skin in the diaper area that's itchy and tender. There may be sores as well and the baby may appear to be uncomfortable and fussy, especially during diaper changes. Call the doctor if you see a rash accompanied by a fever, an unusually severe rash, a rash that persists or gets worse despite home care, a rash that bleeds or oozes, or a rash that causes pain when the baby eliminates.

## PREVENTING DIAPER RASH

The best way to prevent diaper rash is to keep the area clean and dry. Change the baby's diapers as often as you can. If you can, use disposable diapers that contain an absorbent gel that may help draw wetness away from the skin. As part of diaper changes, rinse the baby's bottom with warm water. If you use baby wipes, use wipes that don't contain alcohol or fragrance. Gently pat the baby's skin dry



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with a clean towel or let it air dry. The Mayo Clinic says not to use talcum powder.

Apply a barrier cream, paste or ointment with each diaper change if your baby is prone to diaper rashes. If you change the diaper and the cream is clean, leave it in place and

add another layer. Secure the diaper, but not too tightly. Air-flow within the diaper helps the skin. After diaper changes, wash your hands well.

## TREATING DIAPER RASH

A diaper rash might take several days to improve de-

pending on how severe it is and it may recur. If the rash persists even with home treatment, your doctor may suggest a mild hydrocortisone cream twice a day for three to five days, an antifungal cream or an oral antibiotic. Until the rash clears up, bathe the baby

daily with warm water and a mild, fragrance-free soap or other gentle cleanser. Stop using products that seem to make the rash worse. If you've recently started a new brand of wipes or diapers, or even laundry detergent, that could be the culprit.

# Not Just the Baby Blues

Postpartum Depression.org says about one in eight women nationally experience symptoms of postpartum depression.

The condition often lasts up to six months, but its duration can vary widely based on individual factors and access to treatment. It is estimated that as many as half of women experiencing postpartum depression are not diagnosed by a health care professional.

## SYMPTOMS

The Mayo Clinic says postpartum depression symptoms can vary and range from mild to severe. They include:

- A depressed mood or severe mood swings.
- Crying too much.
- Difficulty bonding with your baby.
- Withdrawing from family and friends.
- A loss of appetite or eating much more than usual.
- An inability to sleep or sleeping too much.
- Overwhelming tiredness or loss of energy.
- A lack of interest and pleasure in activities you used to enjoy.
- Intense irritability and anger.
- The fear that you're not a good mother.
- Hopelessness.
- Feelings of worthlessness,



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shame, guilt or inadequacy.

- The reduced ability to think clearly, concentrate or make decisions.
- Restlessness.
- Severe anxiety and panic attacks.
- Thoughts of harming yourself or your baby.
- Recurring thoughts of death or suicide.

Other parents can experience postpartum depression, too, not just the birth mother. Partners may feel sad, tired, overwhelmed, anxious and

have changes in their eating and sleeping patterns. Postpartum depression in a partner can have the same negative effect on relationships, including with the new baby, and child development as it can in the mother.

## POSTPARTUM PSYCHOSIS

There is also a rare condition called postpartum psychosis that can develop within the first week after delivery. These symptoms are severe and include:

- Feeling confused and lost.
- Having obsessive thoughts about your baby.
- Hallucinating and having delusions.
- Having too much energy and feeling upset.
- Feeling paranoid.
- Making attempts to harm yourself or your baby.

This is a severe condition and requires immediate treatment. Contact a health care provider right away if you experience any of these symptoms.

## HELPING A FRIEND OR LOVED ONE

People with depression may not recognize or can't admit when they're depressed. They may not be as aware of the signs and symptoms of depression or be embarrassed that they're having this problem. If you suspect that a friend or loved one has postpartum depression, urge them to seek medical attention as soon as possible. The sooner it's recognized, the sooner treatment — and healing — can begin.

# Setting Boundaries

When a new life enters the world, people want to see. And touch. And hold. And post pictures. And do a million other things that the new parents may not appreciate.

One of the most important things a new parent must do is set appropriate boundaries about proper behavior around and with the baby. Here are some tips on how to do that and ruffle as few feathers as possible.

## GET ON THE SAME PAGE

Before the baby arrives, it's important to get on the same page with your partner about how people and when people get to meet the new baby. Sit down and have frank discussions with your partner about visiting hours, limiting visitors and more.

Be clear with yourself and your partner about what boundaries you have and why, Parents magazine says. Start with what's most important to you and explain both your reasoning and expectations. Be honest about your own comfort levels and be prepared to calmly state the boundary, your position and to manage the fallout. This can be hard when you're well rested, much less than when you're achy, sleep-deprived and probably full of hormones. So start be-



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fore and give yourself plenty of practice.

## FOR EXAMPLE ...

It's OK to feel overwhelmed, even by something like deciding the who-what-when of postpartum visiting. Some ideas on boundaries to lay down are:

- We're not hosting. Make it clear to friends and family that you are not entertaining them. The house will not be clean and they are more than wel-

come to grab a rag or drop off dinner. They can't just come to hold the baby.

- Set visiting hours. Establish times when people can come visit you and the baby. If needed, put a limit on that time, too. And no unannounced visits. Make people text before they come (no calls in case you're getting some much-needed sleep) and feel good about telling them not today.

- Set some health guidelines.

Require that anyone that wants to hold the baby must be up to date on vaccines. Practice giving a speech about how their immune systems are still dependent on ours if you have to. Also, no kissing.

- Prioritize nap, bed and meal times. These are non-negotiable and this should be insisted upon. Tired and hungry babies are angry babies, and no one wants to deal with that.

- Set social media rules. Ask

friends and family to refrain from posting photos of your baby on social media without your explicit permission.

- Acknowledge and repeat. You can't control how people react to your boundaries, only how you respond. Acknowledge their feelings, but stand firm on your boundary. "I know you are so excited to share pictures of the baby with all your Facebook friends, Aunt Gladys, but we're not sharing pictures online yet."