



## Postpartum Planning Guide

### **Welcome!**

Caring for a newborn is an intense experience. It requires so much of us—physically, emotionally, and mentally. Our lives are turned upside down in both expected and unexpected ways. We must establish new routines and we must learn ourselves as parents and partners.

This guide is intended as a resource to help you navigate the changes that come with a new baby in the postpartum period, often called the fourth trimester. Here you will develop a plan that will give you a starting point for the journey to come. This guide can help you develop a menu of coping skills and self-care, and identify your community of support.

Warmest Wishes,  
The Sistering CU Team

A **postpartum plan** is a way for you to reflect on and communicate your wishes for your experiences in the fourth trimester—to yourself and to your support system. It can help you consider what you want to happen as you recover and bond with the baby, as well as what you want to avoid. A postpartum plan is not set in stone. It also needs to be flexible and account for the fact that things may not go according to plan depending on birth, recovery, the baby’s needs, and your support system. But, having considered what you would like and not like to happen, you and your support can be more prepared for how to handle the unexpected. Sistering CU wants to ensure families with new babies are protected and nurtured in the first few months after birth while mom physically heals and the family transitions and bonds with baby. This requires both self-care *and* community-care.

## **SELF-CARE AND POSTPARTUM MENTAL HEALTH AS MEDICINE**

### **Self-Care is Not a Luxury**

Your health and wellbeing is first priority along with baby’s, in fact they are connected. Nourishing yourself helps you to be better at the other roles in your life, including parenting. It’s important to put taking care of your own spirit on the agenda during the postpartum period.

### **RELAXATION**

Consider: what do I need to do for myself in order to feel at peace? Write some ideas.

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## Emotional Adjustments

Why does self-care matter? Even 1 hour a week to do self-care reduces the rate of postpartum depression. Think of the airplane analogy: in case of an emergency, you must put your oxygen face mask first, then you are able to help someone else.

Consider: What makes you feel happy? What makes you feel healthy? What makes you feel peaceful and at ease? What can help you shift from doing to being? What can transport you to a state of a healing and deep relaxation?

Make a menu of things you'd like to try for self-care.

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## Schedule a daily check-in.

Put a reminder on your phone to check-in with yourself, come back to it if you are busy when it sounds. Have you found something to enjoy today? Music? Fresh Air? Bath? A walk with baby? A talk with a friend?

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Ask yourself: if you have a dream for motherhood/fatherhood/parenthood? Do you have a vision for how it should go? Imagine how you might feel if it doesn't go exactly as planned? How could you support yourself if you were your own best friend in that situation? Imagine what you might do/say for best friend.

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### Signs of perinatal mood disorders in you and/or your partner

<b>Baby Blues</b> (resolves within a few weeks)	<b>Perinatal Mood Disorder</b> (improves with treatment)
Signs include: Feeling overwhelmed Irritability sadness/tearfulness Changes in appetite Sleep difficulties Feeling vulnerable Feeling like you can't cope	Signs include: Feeling overwhelmed Irritability tearfulness/sadness Changes in appetite Sleep difficulties Extreme fatigue Lack of energy and joy anxious/scary thoughts/panic Crying uncontrollably Intense guilt and shame Feeling like a bad parent Hopelessness Physical pains Fear of being alone Discomfort or disconnect with baby Fear about harm to the baby Thoughts of harming yourself or the baby*  *we thank Bethany Smith at uprisingkingston.com for this information

## **Physical Considerations**

- Sleep
  - How much sleep did you get? Do you need to nap with baby? Do you need sleep coaching?
- Nourishment
  - How are you eating?
  - Are you drinking enough water?
- Rest/Exercise
  - Are you resting appropriately?
  - Have you had an opportunity for gentle exercise, if you are ready?
- Showering/Bathing
  - Have you been able to shower or bathe?

## **Mental/Emotional Considerations**

- How is your breathing?
- Have you laughed today?
- Have you cried today?
- Have you been angry?
- Have you felt joy?
- Have you felt anything?

## **Relaxation/focusing techniques**

- Guided Meditations online
- Walk in fresh air and/or around trees
- Listening to favorite music
- Dancing

## Community-Care: Practical Considerations

### *Making the Most of Your Resources*

Make an Ecomap of different levels of support.

Is anyone close by who can help? Friends, family, neighbors, church members? Can anyone come from out of town?



### **Professional Support/Services**

Can you afford some extras for emergencies?

- Groceries delivered?
- Birth Doula/Postpartum Doula
- Sleep consultant

**Local mental health professional: Name/Contact**

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**National Call-In Numbers:** Postpartum Support International 1.800.944.4773

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**Lactation Support: Name/Contact**

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Sleep Support: Name/Contact

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Meal Support: Name/Contact

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### **Community Support**

Can you create more community while pregnant? Join a book club or movie club? Can you join a spiritual community? Pregnancy classes are a great place to meet other parents with new babies!

### **Baby-friendly events and classes**

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**Local Parent Support Groups** (*Sistering CU hosts a group Fridays 10-11:30am in the basement of OSF Hospital*)

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### **Parent friends**

Name/contact

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Name/contact

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Name/contact

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### **Meals**

Meal train/friends ([mealtrain.com](http://mealtrain.com))

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Can you plan a party to freeze meals ahead of the due date?

Freezer meals

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Take out options

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**Immediate Support** (*Trusted friends or family to allow you to sleep or watch older kids*)

Name/Times Available

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Name/Times Available

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Name/Times Available

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*Assess your ecomap for strengths and weaknesses. Think about how you can find support.*

## **Partner level**

### ***Primary Relationships***

Exercise: Relationship Checkup

1. List strengths and weaknesses of the relationship. How can you work on the weaknesses?
2. Discover each other's Love Language ([www.5lovelanguages.com](http://www.5lovelanguages.com)). Use this as a supercharge to help stay connected.
3. Communicate appreciation and gratitude for each other, even for the littlest things.
4. Establish a daily routine to connect. Turn off all electronics and check in (quality over quantity). Take turns listening and asking: what was the best part of your day? What was challenging about your day? What are you looking forward to?



5. Know the signs and symptoms of a perinatal mood disorder for both women and men. It happens to dads too.
6. Remember your shared purpose of parenting this new baby as a team.

### **Workload**

Exercise: Dividing Household Chores

Make a list of all the chores that are normally needed done around the house: care for older children, laundry, trash, plant care, pet care, picking up, kitchen cleaning, etc.

Decide which ones are essential (E), preferable (P), and forgettable (F). Then work out who is going to do what - keeping in mind the priority is “nesting and resting” during the fourth trimester (Johnson 2017).

Are you trying to do too much? What can you take off your plate? Can someone help you with something, even if it isn't done just your way? What can you let go of?

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Allow yourself to accept help: How do you feel about accepting help? Are your feelings preventing you from allowing others to step in and take something off your plate? Is this something you can work through?

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## Emotional Labor

Parenting comes with an increase in emotional labor. Who remembers the doctor appointments? Who remembers what groceries to get? Who remembers the diapers are low, etc.? Research shows that for women, marital happiness is linked to an equitable division of labor. The mental load of emotional labor is often overlooked in that division. The first step is to work on our awareness and communication.

(see <https://www.mindfulreturn.com/emotional-labor/>)

## Individual Care

Research shows that cultivating gratitude can help with overall mental wellbeing. Consider keeping a *Self-Care & Gratitude Journal* and answer three questions daily:

- What did you do for your self-care today?
- How did it make you feel?
- What are you grateful for?

Then, acknowledge something you accomplished today, no matter how small. Each week you can look back and see what self-care really helped you to recharge. You can put that on your list of repeats or go-to's for those days when you need extra support.

## Notes

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## **An Incomplete List of Postpartum Planning Resources and References**

### **Online Plans**

<http://phoenixfamilybirth.com/postpartum-plan/>

[http://www.postpartumnh.com/upload/Postpartum\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.postpartumnh.com/upload/Postpartum_Plan.pdf)

<http://www.withmyowntwohands.net/doclinkpg/newbornandpostpartumplan.pdf>

### **Podcasts**

Mom and Mind.

Episode 89. Planning for Postpartum.

<https://www.facebook.com/MomandMindPodcast/videos/1814547875232543/>

Terrible, Thanks for Asking.

“Me, Too”

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/4-me-too/id1126119288?i=1000379122859&mt=2>

### **Books**

*Pregnancy and Postpartum Care*

Deepak Chopra, David Simon, and Vicki Abrams. 2005. *Magical Beginnings, Enchanted Lives: A Holistic Guide to Pregnancy and Childbirth*. Three Rivers Press.

Lisa Druxman. 2018. *The Empowered Mama: How to Reclaim Your Time and Yourself While Raising a Happy, Healthy Family*. Fair Winds.

Kimberly Johnson. 2017. *The Fourth Trimester: A Postpartum Guide to Healing your body, Balancing Your Emotions & Restoring Your Vitality*. Shambala.

Heng Ou. 2016. *The First Forty Days: The Essential Art of Nourishing the New Mother*. Abrams.

*Baby Care*

Harvey Karp. 2003. *The Happiest Baby on the Block: The New Way to Calm Baby and Help Get Better Rest*. Bantam.

John Medina. 2011. *Brain Rules for Baby: How to Raise a Smart and Happy Child from Zero to Five*. Pear Press