

# Seven Steps for Planning for Postpartum Wellness

By Claire Sebastian, LCSW  
of Mothers' Wellness of Marin



As expectant mothers, we often put much thought and care into what our baby will need, but give little attention to what WE will need. If you develop a plan for YOUR wellness after you have a baby, you'll speed up your recovery and improve your experience of new motherhood.

Using the steps below, create a personal plan based on what you want and need. Steps 1-4 are relevant to all mothers, while developing a plan for all 7 steps is particularly helpful to the new mother.

## 1 Plan for sleep

There is evidence that mothers need a bare minimum of 5 hours of STRAIGHT and UNINTERRUPTED sleep to support proper serotonin levels. Sleep can make the difference between experiencing depression or not. If you have a history of depression, strategize how to achieve this sleep goal. In the first days, sleep may feel impossible, but work with your partner and other helpers to find time during the day or night when you can strive for a 5 hour break from feeding, so that you can get the rest you need.

## 2 Plan for "Me Time"

Studies show that mothers need 2 hours 3x/week of "off call" personal time. To emphasize, you're not "on call" during this time, so try to feel like you can leave your phone behind. Trust your baby is in good hands with your partner or caregiver, and take some enjoyable time away. A solo walk to hear yourself think, a leisurely brunch with an old friend, a matinee with Twizzlers all fit the bill. Taking time to yourself can be uncomfortable for many new moms, but try to remember that it is in your baby's best interest for you to recharge.

## 3 Plan for role changes

Partners' roles often change after a baby is born. To ward off marital stress and disappointment, talk with your partner BEFORE the baby comes home about roles and responsibilities AFTER the baby comes home. Rather than make assumptions about how your partner will respond to being a parent, it's better to directly express your needs and wishes, so that you are not disappointed. There is no better time to work on communicating than now.

## 4 Plan for social support

Motherhood can be isolating, so meeting women with children in the same stages of development is important. These "mom friends" can support you when your family support network is far away. Look for relationships where you feel accepted and where you can be genuine and honest. It may take you a few tries before you find women or a group that feels like "your people."

## 5 Plan for your nutrition and hydration

With a new baby, you may not be able to "eat when hungry" because often women do not feel appropriately hungry for their nutritional and calorie needs. Graze on protein-rich foods to keep your blood sugar level. Stock your home with healthy snacks and make use of your nesting instinct to prepare and freeze some of your favorite protein-rich meals. You also need to stay hydrated. If you wait until you feel thirsty, it's too late. Plan to drink water every 3 hours by setting a reminder on your phone. Dehydration exacerbates anxiety, so if you have a history of anxiety, make meeting this need a priority.

## 6 Plan for your physical health

So much happens to your body after you have a baby, including a sudden drop in hormone levels. That drop impacts your mood and energy. Plan to support your physical needs by scheduling an appointment with your doctor in advance. Ask for a blood panel to test for depletions or other irregularities, particularly thyroid & iron.

## 7 Plan for your emotional health

Speak with your doctor about ways to support your mood after having a baby. As many as 1 in 5 new mothers experience postpartum depression, and up to 85% of new mothers have what is commonly referred to as the "baby blues." Many natural supplements, including Omega 3 fish oil and DHA, are considered helpful in improving mood in the postpartum period. Magnesium, Vitamin D, and Folic Acid can also help with depression. Plan to reach out to your OBGYN or pediatrician about getting additional support if you need it. With support, these feelings will pass.

For many women, planning for motherhood is an exciting time. When designing your nursery and choosing your registry, don't forget to develop a plan for your wellness after your baby comes home. By following these seven steps, you can thoughtfully anticipate your needs and prepare for recovery and wellness.

Claire Sebastian, LCSW

www.clairesebastianlcsww.com | clairesebastianlcsww@gmail.com | 415-529-6560