

Postpartum Meal Angels

Ask a friend who has a talent for organizing to be your “Meal Angel Captain” and to arrange your postpartum meals-on-wheels before your baby is born. Some parents have friends and family fill out a meal-calendar at their Mother Blessing or Baby Shower.

Week	Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							

In addition to people who have offered to bring by food, write down the names and phone numbers of ANYONE who has offered to come by and help you out in any way. Ask them what days they are available and schedule them to come cook/clean/help out with the baby/run errands/etc. on that day. If you don't need (or want) them, you can always call to cancel.

List of Potential Meal Angels/Postpartum Helpers:

Name: _____

Contact: _____

Follow Your Bliss

Too many parents at the end of their baby's first year, or even eighteen years later, realize that they gave up the things they loved to do and that gave them bliss when they became parents. Becoming a conscious parent does require sacrifice, and it also requires modeling for our children how to live creative, balanced lives.

Write three things that have brought you bliss in the past. Maybe you are doing it now or perhaps it is something you've always wanted to do but never made happen. Keep in mind that you will be fulfilling your Bliss List as a new parent, so white-water rafting trips or skiing the Alps may not be realistic at this time.

Mom

Dad

Us As A Couple

Be sure to set aside time to follow your bliss once your baby is born. Keep track of the dates you followed your bliss and/or helped your partner to follow theirs during the first year of your baby's life.

Postpartum Depression

"I spent five months in the darkest place I've ever been. I'm a woman who had available resources, close friends and family, a present and loving husband and the financial ability to seek out assistance. With access to all this, I still put on the face of being in control. I still insisted to anyone who asked that I was 'fine.'

Why did I do that? Looking back, I can give two reasons. The first is shame. I couldn't admit to anyone, even my husband, that I was having a hard time coping. How do you express that you are in complete despair when everything you've been told or seen in the media represents new motherhood as the happiest, most fulfilling time in a woman's life? I didn't know anyone else who felt this way.

The second reason is immobilization. This is the harshest reality of depression. I couldn't make a move on my own. Depression robbed me of any energy it would take to make an extra phone call, get an appointment or even try to explain how I felt."

-Marie Osmond, Newsweek, July 2, 2001.

Postpartum depression and related illnesses (such as postpartum anxiety) are not well understood, accepted or tolerated in our society. When postpartum illness presents, most parents are taken off-guard; they don't know what is happening, what to do, or who to turn to for help. Because the mother may not recognize her own symptoms (or may attempt to repress them if she does), it is important that fathers and other family members or friends are familiar with the symptoms of postpartum depression. There are many approaches to treating postpartum illness. Left untreated, postpartum depression can adversely affect the mother-child relationship, erode a marriage and worse.

Baby Blues

Sudden bursts of crying and *fleeting* feelings of sadness, helplessness, hopelessness, and doubts about being a good mother. Blues only last a few days to two weeks after giving birth.

Postpartum Depression

Postpartum depression can be mild to severe; it may begin two to six weeks after giving birth, even as late as three to five months, and lasts six months or longer postpartum.

The sooner a mother with PPD receives treatment, the sooner she will be able to make a healthy postpartum transition. If she can't ask for help, make the phone call for her. If one doctor doesn't understand PPD, consult another one who does. Simple interventions, such as improving her diet or getting a few nights sleep, can make a big difference. Teach the baby to sleep through the night or care for the baby a few nights a week to allow the mother to sleep at least four consecutive hours, which will raise her serotonin levels - and this alone may improve or resolve her PPD. Sometimes, counseling helps to resolve issues surrounding her own mother-daughter relationship, clarify the role and expectations of motherhood, and integrate the "losses" of becoming a mother has brought (e.g. changes in marriage or career). Severe postpartum depression may be caused by chemical or hormonal imbalances and may require medication.

Take a look at this checklist to familiarize yourself with the symptoms of **postpartum depression**. Rate the intensity of the symptoms: 0 - not true at all; 1 - slightly true but not interfering with my daily activity; 2- true and is interfering but not keeping me from functioning; 3 - very true, unable to function. Keep track of symptoms for 11 days. If you notice mostly 2's and 3's, professional help is recommended.

Symptoms: I Am...	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Crying daily for no real reason lasting beyond a week											
Feeling anxious, can't sit still											
Feeling very sad											
Having panic attacks; racing heart, can't breathe											
Constantly worried about my baby's health/safety											
Not feeling connected to my baby/other people											
Feeling hopeless											
Unmotivated, I'm not taking care of my every day needs											
Afraid of being alone											
Confused											
Unable to concentrate											
Unable to sleep even though exhausted											
Exaggerated mood swings; feeling down to feeling too good											
Feeling guilty, unworthy											
Unable to control obsessive thoughts; talking incessantly											
If you have any of the following, seek help immediately: Suicidal thoughts											
Fear of fantasies of harming my baby											
Experiencing bizarre thoughts or dreams											

Postpartum Expectations: Hers

After your baby comes, everything changes. There's more to do, and less time to do it. The easiest time to begin sorting out what needs to be done and who's gonna do it is BEFORE your baby comes. Use this exercise to check your expectations and begin a constructive dialog. Fill out the questionnaire on your own, then compare your answers with your partner.

WHILE THE BABY NEEDS TO BE CARED FOR,
WHO WILL USUALLY DO THE FOLLOWING:

Meals

- _____ Cook Meals
- _____ Wash dishes/start dishwasher
- _____ Put the dishes away
- _____ Clean the kitchen: put away the food, clean sink,
wipe down counters and stove, sweep and mop the floor,
and take out the trash
- _____ shop for groceries and put them away

Laundry

*Did you know that for each load of laundry you do now, you
will do four loads after your baby comes?*

- _____ Wash the laundry, and how often?
- _____ Dry the laundry
- _____ Fold or hang the laundry and put it away

Daily "Tidy Up" of the House

- _____ Clean the diaper pail (if you have one)
- _____ Pick up newspapers, magazines, clothes, etc.
- _____ Vacuum and dust
- _____ Clean the bathroom

Other

- _____ Feed the pets
- _____ Pay the Bills
- _____ Put in a new light bulb when the old one burns out
- _____ Take the baby to the doctor for well-baby visits
- _____ Arrange child care for your dates

*Suggested Reading: When
Partner's Become Parents
by Philip and Carolyn
Cowan.*

*In the Cowans'
comprehensive study of the
challenges 72 couples faced
from mid-pregnancy to the
children's kindergarten years,
they found that the greater
the discrepancy between a
wife's expectations of her
husband's involvement and
his actual involvement, the
more her satisfaction in the
marriage declined in the first
18 months after birth.*

busy available withdrawn **loving** helpful

Grandparents could be emotionally supportive, financially or materially supportive; intrusive, respectful...

This is a sentence completion exercise; write down your first thought.

DURING THE EARLY POSTPARTUM TRANSITION:

I think that becoming a mother will make me feel more: _____

I think becoming a parent will make him/her feel more: _____

Becoming parents will change our relationship, and I imagine s/he will be more _____ toward me/us. I think I will be more _____ toward him/her.

I am most concerned about: _____

I think my partner is most concerned about: _____

I'm envisioning childcare will be shared in this way: _____

I think my partner envisions sharing childcare in this way: _____

When my parents become grandparents, I expect them to be: _____

When my partner's parents become grandparents, I expect them to be: _____

When we become parents, my relationships with my/my partner's parents will: _____

When we become parents, I think my partner's relationship with my/my partner's parents will: _____

Our friends and social life will: _____

I imagine my partner thinks our friends and social life will: _____

During our time-consuming first year of our baby's life I know I will have to make sacrifices. What I will miss most is: _____

What I think my partner will miss most is _____

I think my partner's role in the breastfeeding relationship is _____

I think my partner views his/her role as _____

Postpartum Expectations: Partner's

After your baby comes, everything changes. There's more to do, and less time to do it. The easiest time to begin sorting out what needs to be done and who's gonna do it is BEFORE your baby comes. Use this exercise to check your expectations and begin a constructive dialog. Fill out the questionnaire on your own, then compare your answers with your partner.

WHILE THE BABY NEEDS TO BE CARED FOR,
WHO WILL USUALLY DO THE FOLLOWING:

Meals

- _____ Cook Meals
- _____ Wash dishes/start dishwasher
- _____ Put the dishes away
- _____ Clean the kitchen: put away the food, clean sink,
wipe down counters and stove, sweep and mop the floor,
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*A small survey was conducted
in a Constructive Living,
"Renewing Your Relationship"
program. Participating couples
were asked what they argued
most frequently about. The
leading answer was "children,"
the second answer was
"disorganized living space."
Clearly the "stuff" in our lives
has the potential to wreak havoc
not only with our own minds
and lives, but with others who
must share the same space with
us.*

*-Constructive Living Quarterly,
Fall 2000*

busy available withdrawn **loving** helpful

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DURING THE EARLY POSTPARTUM TRANSITION:

I think that becoming a parent will make me feel more: _____

I think becoming a mother will make her feel more: _____

Becoming parents will change our relationship, and I imagine she will be more
_____ toward me/us. I think I will be more _____ toward her.

I am most concerned about: _____

I think my partner is most concerned about: _____

I'm envisioning childcare will be shared in this way: _____

I think my partner envisions sharing childcare in this way: _____

When my parents become grandparents, I expect them to be: _____

When my partner's parents become grandparents, I expect them to be: _____

When we become parents, my relationships with my/my partner's parents
will: _____

When we become parents, I think my partner's relationship with my/my partner's parents will:

Our friends and social life will: _____

I imagine my partner thinks our friends and social life will: _____

During our time-consuming first year of our baby's life I know I will have to make sacrifices. What I
will miss most is: _____

What I think my partner will miss most is _____

I think that my role in the breastfeeding relationship is _____

I think my partner views my role as _____