

# A - Z

## Glossary of Postpartum Terms

The following terms are a mix of resources, healing modalities, traditional practices, aspects of postpartum and a few of my own postpartum inventions, which are in quotations. With the term “mother-baby duo” I am recognizing the interdependence and the inseparability of a birthing person and a baby’s wellness.

By including traditional practices, my intention is to show that prioritizing rest, support, and care during the postpartum is found throughout the world, including in the US where many people follow their traditions. People whose families have lost their postpartum traditions can look to the wisdom of traditional practices with respect, without appropriating.

This document continues to grow and evolve. Don’t hesitate to reach out to me with additional terms or resources to include. How the postpartum is approached is deeply cultural and with my work I am hoping to nurture a culture in which we are honored and cared for after giving birth.

This glossary is available for free on my website. And finally, the content in this document is not intended to be a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment.

**COLOSTRUM** The milky substance produced by the breasts for the first 2-4 days after birth, before true milk “comes in.” It is rich with proteins, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins, minerals, proteins, as well as antibodies that protect against bacteria and viruses.

**COSLEEPING** The practice of babies and children sleeping with their parents in bed, or adjacent to the bed in a “co-sleeper”. Many mothers choose to cosleep because it enables them to get more sleep, maintain their breast milk supply, and is another way to deepen their bond. There are safety practices to be aware of, including types of bedding and not exposing babies to adults who have smoked or have consumed alcohol or drugs. Sleeping with an infant on couches and in reclining chairs is not safe.

**CRANIOSACRAL THERAPY (CST)** A gentle, noninvasive bodywork modality that works with the craniosacral system. It can help postpartum people recover emotionally from their birth experiences, as well as supporting the return of strength, alignment, and mobility to the body. For babies, a CST session can minimize or eliminate the repercussions of difficult births, addressing many health challenges that may arise including difficulty with breastfeeding.

**CUARENTENA** The Latin American tradition of giving mothers 40 days of nourishing food, warmth, rest, and special care in order to fully recover from birth.

**FAMILY-CENTERED CESAREAN** Practices that address the emotional and physical needs of mothers and babies, specifically emotional support, bonding, breastfeeding, and microbiome transfer.

**FEEDING ON DEMAND** Following the mother’s instincts and the baby’s hunger cues; not feeding at set time increments. Newborns have very small stomachs and need to feed very frequently to meet their nutritional needs.

**FOOD RESTRICTIONS** Foods that are avoided during the postpartum either for the mother’s health or for the baby’s. Specific foods vary greatly culture to culture. Some commonly avoided foods are cabbage and other brassica family vegetables, caffeine, sour foods, and cold foods.

**FROM MOTHERS TO MOTHERS** An organization perserving multi-cultural postpartum wisdom  
[www.m2mpostpartum.org](http://www.m2mpostpartum.org)

**FULL SPECTRUM DOULA** A doula who provides support to families through all pregnancy experiences, including birth, abortion, adoption, surrogacy, miscarriage, and stillbirth.

**HERBAL PERI-BOTTLE** A plastic squeeze bottle filled with warm sitz bath herbs, used to rinse instead of wiping with toilet paper in order to decrease irritation and support healing the injured tissues.

**HIND MILK, FORE MILK** The first milk that a baby gets at the beginning of a feeding is called the fore milk. As a feeding progresses the hind milk is produced with its higher fat content.

**HOLISTIC PELVIC CARETM** Physical and energetic healing in the pelvic bowl, supporting physical and emotional recovery from birth. Resolving symptoms such as pelvic pain, discomfort, incontinence, hemorrhoids, or muscle weakness, and greatly assists overall healing. Pioneered by Portland-based women’s health physical therapist Tami Kent. See “pelvic floor work”.

**HOME BIRTH CESAREAN** A birth that was planned as an out of hospital birth and ends in cesarean.

**“A-TEAM”** Two to four friends who have agreed to be your allies, aunties, and advocates. This is a way of bringing intentionality to friendship so that the friends can work together in providing support.

**AFANTANBAH** The Somali tradition of giving mothers 40 days of nourishing food, warmth, rest, and special care in order to fully recover from birth.

**AFTERPAINS** Contractions of the uterus during the first week postpartum, often more painful with subsequent babies and during breastfeeding.

**ATTACHMENT PARENTING** This term, coined by William and Martha Sears, is based on Attachment Theory which has come from 60 years of developmental psychology research showing a biological imperative for the mother-baby bond. Attachment parenting philosophy focuses on the nurturing connection between parents and their children. It is popularized by parenting practices that are the norm throughout the world and through out human history. These include: breastfeeding on demand, skin-to-skin, babies sleeping with or near their mother, and baby wearing.

**BABY WEARING** The practice of carrying a baby in a carrier, including fabric wraps, slings, and packs, etc. It enables a mother or other caregiver to hold the baby close, with less physical strain, and have hands free for tending to other things. Research shows that facing in is preferable for a young baby’s hips and back.

**BELLY WRAPPING OR BINDING** The cross-cultural practice of wrapping the mother’s belly after birth. The wrapping supports the uterus and other organs and abdominal muscles in their return to a pre-pregnancy state. Other benefits may include decreased bleeding, warming of the abdomen and uterus, reduced swelling, reorienting core muscles and improved posture. Modern belly binding girdles and traditional cloth wraps are available for purchase. Or a long piece of fabric, approximately 5 feet by 1 foot, can be used by wrapping and twisting every one and a half times around.

**BIRTH DOULA** A trained labor coach who assists mothers during labor and birth. She provides continuous emotional support, as well as assistance with other non-medical aspects of care, and can help navigate the medical choices that may arise. (See also full spectrum doula and postpartum doula)

**BONDING** An emotional and biochemical interplay between parents, as well as other caregivers, and baby that begins immediately after birth and continues to develop over time. It builds a secure attachment for the infant supporting optimal neurological development. For parents it sets into play a hormonal chain reaction that supports responsive and loving parenting and overall maternal wellbeing.

**BREASTFEEDING GRIEF** The feelings of sadness and loss that people who plan to exclusively breastfeed feel when it doesn’t happen, coined by author Hilary Jacobson.

**CIRCUMCISION** is the surgical removal of the foreskin, the tissue covering the penis. There are many reasons parents choose not to circumcise their sons, including complications with the surgery, anesthesia, and lifelong damage to the functionality of the penis. The foreskin is a man’s most erogenous zone and it also acts to protect the penis. No major medical association, including the American Medical Association, recommends it for infants, and at this point the circumcision rate in the US is at 32%.

**HOME BIRTH CESAREAN** An organization that provides support and awareness around planned out-of-hospital births that end in cesareans, referred to as Homebirth Cesareans (HBC). Resources include workshops for healthcare providers and mothers, an active facebook group, and book and workbook: Homebirth Cesarean and Healing from a Homebirth Cesarean.

**“HOUSE FAIRY”** A close friend, relative, or postpartum doula who is on call and ready to prepare your home for you and your newborn when you come home after the birth.

**ICAN** “The International Cesarean Awareness Network, Inc. (ICAN) is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to improve maternal-child health by preventing unnecessary cesareans through education, providing support for cesarean recovery, and promoting Vaginal Birth After Cesarean (VBAC).”

**INFANT MASSAGE** Nurturing touch by a parent, often including rubbing in oil, and working through the joints, and stretching the limbs. It supports bonding, development, and health. Infant massage classes taught in the US are rooted in the Indian tradition.

**INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS** Strange and often disturbing dreams, images, and thoughts that mothers experience during postpartum. If relatively mild these thoughts can be part of healthy postpartum experience. If they become too frequent or strong, they may be a symptom of a Postpartum Mood and Anxiety disorder.

**KANGAROO CARE** The practice of holding a baby against the chest, skin-to-skin, inside of the parent’s shirt. This is especially beneficial for premature or sick babies.

**LA LECHE LEAGUE (LLL)** An international nonprofit organization that offers through peer support, encouragement, information, and education. LLL promotes a better understanding of breastfeeding as an important element in the healthy development of the baby and mother.

**LACTATION CONSULTANT** A health professional who provides breastfeeding support. This is not a standardized profession and there is wide variability in level of education and type of philosophy. International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLC) go through a rigorous training and certification process.

**LOCHIA** The bloody discharge lasting for 4-6 weeks postpartum. The first week is much like menstruation and then lightens as the weeks progress.

**LYING-IN** A traditional European and European American practice that gives women (often 6 weeks of) nourishing food, warmth, rest, and special care in order to fully recover from birth.

**“MAMA-SITTER”** A friend, family member, or postpartum doula who comes to simply be with the mother and her new baby.

**MEAL TRAIN** An online schedule for friends and family members who have signed up to deliver meals. This can be catered to a family’s diet and needs.

**MICROBIOME (HUMAN)** The ecological community of microorganisms that are intrinsic to the human body. A growing body of research is showing that much of human health and wellbeing may be affected by microorganisms of the gut, with a strong correlation between greater diversity and greater health.

**MICROBIOME TRANSFER** The transfer of the birthing person’s microbiome to their baby during and after birth through exposure through the birth canal, skin-to-skin contact, and breastfeeding.

**“MILK RETREAT”** This is a set amount of time to receive rest, support, and care in order to fully recover from birth. It is a time to devote to feeding the baby -thus “milk retreat,” and requires planning.

**MOTHER ROASTING** Refers to specific warming practices such as moxibustion treatments and warm salt rubs. It was coined by an American midwife referring to the Southeast Asian practices of using coals and fires to warm new mothers after birth. See postpartum warmth.

**MOXIBUSTION TREATMENT** A Chinese Medicine practice of burning mugwort over the skin for deep heat penetration and to activate acupuncture points. It is used during postpartum to return heat to the womb, which supports recovery and long term vitality.

**NAM LUA IN** The Vietnamese postpartum tradition of laying in a bed over hot coals, and giving women nourishing food, warmth, rest, and special care in order to fully recover from birth.

**“NEWBORN MAP”** This is the geography of your first weeks after birth, the places you feel most unguarded and truly safe. This can be the rooms of your home, the homes of family or friends, offices you visit for appointments, or public places that you love.

**NURSING STATION** A bed, a comfortable chair, or couch with water, snacks, a book to read. If there are siblings, a special toy or book that come out only during feeding can be included.

**PELVIC FLOOR PHYSICAL THERAPY** A branch of physical therapy that address the pelvic floor muscles through direct manipulation and excises. See holistic pelvic work.

**PERINATAL COUNSELOR / MATERNAL HEALTH THERAPIST** A therapist trained in addressing mental health issues that arise during pregnancy and postpartum.

**PERINATAL MOOD AND ANXIETY DISORDERS** Mental health issues that begin during pregnancy or up to two years postpartum, including depression, anxiety, OCD, bipolar mood disorder, and postpartum psychosis.

**PHYSIOLOGIC POSTPARTUM CARE** “A system of care that both follows and honors the physiologic design of postpartum women. The ‘optimal results’ for postpartum care is not just the survival of Mothers, but the thriving of Mothers. Physiologic Postpartum Care recognizes Mothers as the foundation of humanity, and supports Mothers life-long health and vitality in the name of continuity of Life.” This term was coined by Rachelle Garcia Seliga.

**PLACENTA ENCAPSULATION/CONSUMPTION** The placenta is dried and powdered and put in capsules for the mother to take during her postpartum. Immediately after birth, a small part of the placenta can be blended with juice or in a smoothie. Consumption of the placenta has anecdotally been shown to speed recovery, strengthen vitality, and balance emotions.

**PLAN C** Is a term that evolved from the Homebirth Cesarean community, specifically referring to the potential of a homebirth transfer to cesarean birth, Plan C is a tool and planning guide used to address the possibility of a cesarean and identify a family's highest needs and priorities in a surgical birth. Learn more about this in the book "Homebirth Cesarean" by Courtney Jarecki.

**POST TRAUMATIC GROWTH** The idea that positive change is experienced as a result of the struggle with a major life crisis or a traumatic event.

**"POSTPARTUM BUDDY"** This is a friend who agrees to have regular check in's or who will join you for outings. This could be a walking partner, or a buddy to go to the breastfeeding meet-up.

**POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION** The most common complication in childbirth, postpartum depression is a temporary and treatable depression.

**POSTPARTUM DOULA** A trained professional who provides support and guidance to a new mother and her family. This may include informational guidance and support in breastfeeding and newborn care, light household chores, meal preparation, errands, and care of mother and baby. A postpartum doula's care is catered to the family's needs.

**POSTPARTUM NAVIGATOR** A postpartum navigator assists parents in postpartum planning during pregnancy and then offers ongoing support during the first three months postpartum.

**POSTPARTUM NET** The contingency part of the postpartum plan that details resources for unexpected challenges and plans for extending the time of rest and support.

**"POSTPARTUM PAUSE"** The moment when a postpartum mother feels ready to take on more household or work responsibilities and instead of jumping back in, she pauses to savor her newborn, her family, and this special time.

**POSTPARTUM PLAN** 1) A detailed outline of how a family will have the rest, support, and care they need and resources to help them through unexpected challenges. "Milk Retreat + Postpartum Net" 2) A section of the birth plan that outlines the choices a family has made for the care of mother and baby immediately

**POSTPARTUM POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)** Most often this illness is caused by a real or perceived trauma during delivery or postpartum and symptoms include disturbing thoughts or feelings related to past traumas. Symptoms may include intrusive re-experiencing of a past traumatic event, flashbacks or nightmares, avoidance of stimuli associated with the event, persistent increased arousal (irritability, difficulty sleeping, hyper vigilance, exaggerated startle response), anxiety and panic attacks and feeling a sense of unreality and detachment. A person can have post traumatic stress without enough symptoms to be diagnosed with PTSD.

**"POSTPARTUM PR"** How a family and their community publicly shares about the birth, the baby, and how the family is doing, including social media, the sharing of images, and face-to-face communication. With intentionality, privacy can be maintained and connection nurtured.

**POSTPARTUM WARMTH** The cross-cultural traditional practice that includes keeping warm, actively returning heat to the body, and avoiding cold.

**PROPER LATCH** Occurs when breastfeeding is effectively getting milk to the baby and is comfortable for the mother. Ongoing pain in the nipples during breastfeeding is a sign of poor latch which can result in lowering a mother's supply. There are many possible causes of a poor latch, including the use of pacifiers and artificial nipples, as well as lip and tongue ties.

**PSI (POSTPARTUM SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL)** An organization dedicated to helping women suffering from perinatal mood and anxiety disorders including: depression, anxiety, post traumatic stress syndrome, OCD, bipolar mood disorder, and postpartum psychosis . Group chats with experts, local volunteers, support for partners, and lots of useful information on the website.

**"SIBLING TRAIN"** An online schedule of friends and family members who have signed up to have special time with the older siblings of a newborn.

**SITZ BATH** A warm herbal bath that supports the healing of the pelvic floor (tears, skid marks, hemorrhoids, etc). A midwife or herbalist can prescribe the right mix of herbs to address specific conditions.

**SKIN-TO-SKIN** The practice of putting a baby directly on the parent's chest without any blankets or clothes between them. This supports the stabilization of the baby's temperature, heart rate, breathing, and blood sugar. It also supports the transfer of beneficial bacteria, seeding the microbiome. It is soothing for the parent and the baby, supports breastfeeding, milk supply, and the bonding process.

**SUPPLEMENTING** The practice of giving a breastfed baby either formula or other human breast milk. Supplementing, even a little may diminish milk production. If supplementing is needed there are often resources for securing donated milk either privately or through a free milk bank.

**SUPPLY** The amount of milk produced. Oversupply and undersupply are both challenges that affect mother and baby's health and wellbeing. Signs of undersupply have to do with a baby's growth as well as the number of wet and soiled diapers depending on age. Oversupply can result in engorgement and mastitis. Many things can affect supply including foods, stress, contact with baby, frequency of feeding, and type of latch.

**TIES** This includes tongue-ties, lip-ties, and cheek-ties all of which can result in a poor latch and super painful nipples. If a tie is identified or suspected and there are breastfeeding challenges, finding a knowledgeable and supportive health care provider is important. It is worth mentioning that within the medical professions there is not a universal system of diagnosis. Two significant signs are a painful latch and lack milk transfer which is diagnosed by weighing the baby before and after a feeding.

**UTERINE MASSAGE** Massaging the belly helps the uterus return to its original size, expelling extra fluids. It is done by health care providers directly after birth and it can be continued for the following weeks by the mother.

**UTERINE / ORGAN MASSAGE MODALITIES** An external non-invasive manipulation that repositions internal organs that have shifted, encouraging the flow of blood, lymph, nerve and chi. There are specific modalities within in traditional Chinese and Meso-American medicine systems.

**ZUO YUE ZI** Or "sitting the month" is the traditional Chinese practice of giving mothers 30 days of nourishing food, warmth, rest, and special care in order to fully recover from birth.





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