



The Postpartum Survival Guide

What They Don't Always Tell You
(But Should!)



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WELCOME

Hello, I'm your Full Spectrum Doula, Kat Thompson.

Hey there, beautiful human,

Whether you've just welcomed your baby or you're preparing for the journey ahead, I want to begin by saying this: you matter. Your healing, your rest, your emotional well-being – it's just as important as the baby's needs.

Postpartum isn't just a recovery period; it's a transformation. It's raw, tender, and incredibly powerful. This little guide isn't here to tell you what you should be doing – it's here to offer honest insight, simple tips, and a reminder that you're not alone.

I believe that every parent deserves care that honours their unique experience, their culture, and their needs – whether this is your first baby or your fifth, whether you birthed at home, in a hospital, or via cesarean.



As a full-spectrum doula and wellness specialist, I'm here to walk alongside you, not to overwhelm you with advice, but to offer care that meets you exactly where you are.

You've done something extraordinary. You deserve support that is just as extraordinary.

Let's get into it.

- Kat Thompson



CHAPTER I

What's Normal, What's Not – Healing After Birth

Physical Recovery

Your body just did one of the most demanding things it will ever do. It's okay if healing feels messy, slow, or different from what you expected.

Here's what can be normal:

- **Bleeding (lochia):** Expect red bleeding for the first few days, tapering into brown or yellowish discharge over a few weeks. Call your provider if bleeding becomes heavy again after slowing down.
- **Perineal soreness or stitches:** Ice packs, witch hazel pads, and sitz baths can help ease discomfort.
- **Cesarean recovery:** Take it slow. Stay on top of your pain meds, keep the incision dry, and ask for help lifting anything heavier than your baby.

You're allowed to take your time. This is not a race.

Emotional Recovery

The “baby blues” are common in the first 1–2 weeks – mood swings, crying spells, irritability, and anxiety due to hormonal shifts and lack of sleep.

But if these feelings persist or intensify, it could be postpartum depression or anxiety – and that's okay too. You're not broken. And there is help.

Reach out to a care provider or support person if you experience:

- Ongoing sadness, hopelessness, or rage
- Trouble bonding with baby
- Intense worry or fear that doesn't go away
- Feeling like you're “not yourself”

You don't have to wait until it's “bad enough.” If something feels off, you deserve to be heard.

CHAPTER I

What's Normal, What's Not – Healing After Birth

Postnatal Depletion: A Real Thing

You might feel foggy, exhausted, anxious, or like you're "running on empty."

That's not weakness – that could be postnatal depletion, a state of physical and emotional exhaustion caused by:

- Nutrient loss from pregnancy and birth
- Hormonal shifts
- Lack of sleep and recovery time

This is where nutrition, rest, and support really matter (we'll get to that in the next section).

Gentle Reminders:

- There's no right way to feel postpartum.
- Just because something is common doesn't mean you have to "tough it out."
- If something hurts – physically or emotionally – you're allowed to ask for help.



CHAPTER II

Nourish to Flourish – Nutrition for Healing

What you eat in the weeks after birth isn't about "bouncing back" – it's about building back. Pregnancy and birth take a huge toll on the body, depleting your stores of iron, protein, minerals, and more. Good nutrition isn't just fuel – it's repair work.

Whether you're a foodie, a microwave warrior, or somewhere in between, here's what your postpartum body truly craves.

Foundational Foods

These are the nourishing basics your body will thank you for:

- **Protein:** Repairs tissues and supports milk supply
 - Eggs, bone broth, chicken, lentils, beans, Greek yogurt
- **Healthy Fats:** Supports hormone health and brain function
 - Avocados, olive oil, nuts, seeds, fatty fish
- **Iron-rich foods:** Replenishes iron lost during birth
 - Red meat, leafy greens, liver, dried fruit, pumpkin seeds
- **Complex Carbs:** Sustains energy
 - Sweet potatoes, oats, brown rice, quinoa

- **Fibre + Fluids:** Eases constipation and supports digestion
 - Water, smoothies, chia pudding, prunes, leafy greens

Bone Broth: The Unsung Hero of Postpartum

In nearly every culture around the world, new parents are given warm, soft, easy-to-digest foods after birth, and **bone broth** is often at the top of that list.

Why it's amazing:

- Easy on the digestive system
- Full of collagen, amino acids, and minerals
- Supports gut repair, joint recovery, and postpartum tissue healing
- Hydrating and comforting – especially during night feeds
- Sip it warm, use it in soups or stews, or add it to grains while cooking.

CHAPTER II

Nourish to Flourish – Nutrition for Healing

Cultural Nourishment Traditions

So many cultural postpartum traditions center on warmth, restoration, and ritual.

Examples include:

- Congee in Chinese culture
- Lactation-supportive teas in Ethiopian and Middle Eastern cultures
- Warm healing baths with herbs across Indigenous traditions
- Spices like turmeric and ginger in South Asian cooking

Don't be afraid to lean into your roots – or adopt traditions that resonate.

Healing foods don't need to be fancy or Insta-worthy. They just need to feel good to you.

Helpful Tips (That May Not Be Evidence-Based... But Work!)

- **Keep snacks at every station:** a granola bar in the diaper caddy, trail mix beside the bed.
- **Use a thermos for warm meals:** so your food is still warm 2 hours later.
- Smoothie bags in the freezer = instant breakfast.
- Let people help, but tell them what helps. ("Drop off soup" is a clearer ask than "let me know if you need anything.")
- Keep a water bottle with a straw – it's easier to sip when your hands are full.



CHAPTER III

Asking for Help – Mental Health & Support Systems

There's a lot of pressure to "love every moment." But the truth? Some moments are hard. Some are messy. Some leave you crying in the shower while Googling "is it normal to hate the newborn stage?"

You are not alone.

Postpartum is a whirlwind of hormones, sleep deprivation, identity shifts, and healing – all while caring for a new little human. It's okay to need help, and it's strong to ask for it.

What's "Normal" Anyway?

Some emotional ups and downs are expected – "baby blues" often show up around day 3–5 postpartum and usually fade after a couple weeks.

But when feelings linger or grow heavier, it could be more than the blues.

Look out for:

- Feeling persistently sad, irritable, angry, numb, or anxious
- Trouble sleeping (even when baby sleeps)
- Intrusive or scary thoughts you can't control
- Feeling disconnected from your baby
- Not feeling like yourself

These are signs to reach out – not signs that you're failing.

Who Can Help

You don't need to navigate this alone. Support options include:

- **Postpartum doulas (hi, that's me!):** emotional, physical, and practical help
- **Mental health therapists:** especially those specializing in postpartum and reproductive trauma

CHAPTER III

Asking for Help – Mental Health & Support Systems

- **Peer support groups:** both online and local (ask me if you need referrals!)
- **Your partner, family, or close friends:** when you clearly communicate your needs
- **Your doctor or midwife:** they can screen for postpartum mood disorders

Postnatal Depletion is Real

This isn't just "mom tired." It's the result of nutrient loss, hormonal shifts, sleep disruption, and emotional exhaustion over weeks or months, sometimes years.

Symptoms may include:

- Extreme fatigue
- Brain fog or forgetfulness
- Low mood or irritability
- Increased susceptibility to illness
- Hormonal imbalances

Postnatal depletion isn't a diagnosis, but it is a call for deeper care and nourishment.

Normalize Needing Help

You don't have to be in crisis to get support. And you don't need to hit "rock bottom" before talking to someone.

If you're thinking "I'm not sure if it's bad enough to talk to someone..." – that's your sign to talk to someone.



CHAPTER IV

Practical Tips for a Smoother Fourth Trimester

Because “rest when the baby sleeps” is not the whole story.

The postpartum period – sometimes called the “fourth trimester” – is a time of deep physical healing, emotional transformation, and bonding.

While everyone’s experience is unique, here are a few gentle tips to help soften the edges.

Nourish Your Body

- **Prioritize warm, easy-to-digest meals.** Think soups, stews, congee, and bone broth – these support digestion and replenish vital nutrients.
- **Stock up on high-protein snacks you can eat one-handed:** boiled eggs, energy bites, trail mix, or Greek yogurt.
- **Hydration matters.** Keep a water bottle (with a straw!) nearby at all times – especially when nursing.

Cultural Note: Many traditions encourage 30–40 days of rest with warming foods, massages, and minimal outside contact. You deserve care that reflects your values – let’s honour your postpartum in a way that feels supportive to you.

Lower the Bar (on Purpose)

- **Keep a basket of essentials in every room:** diapers, snacks, burp cloths, nipple cream, chapstick, and hair ties.
- **Laundry doesn’t need to be folded.** Let clean clothes live in a “clean pile” if that’s what works.
- **Say “no thank you”** to visitors who expect to be entertained – and say “yes please” to those who bring food or tidy up.

Practical over perfect wins every time.

CHAPTER IV

Practical Tips for a Smoother Fourth Trimester

Sleep (or Rest) When You Can

- If you have a partner or support person, **trade shifts overnight** or during the day – even 90 minutes of uninterrupted rest helps.
- **Use safe babywearing** to contact nap while having your hands free.
- **Forget the dishes.** Nap instead.

Bonus Tip: Dim the lights and try calming tea or bone broth before bed – it helps signal your nervous system to wind down.

Save These Lifesavers

- White noise app (for baby and for you)
- Grocery delivery or pickup
- Postpartum doula or sleep support (virtual or in-person)
- Meal train organizer (like MealTrain.com or GiveInKind)

Remember...

This season is temporary. You're not meant to "bounce back" – you're meant to be held. Let your support system show up for you. Let the mess exist. Let your body rest.

You don't need to do it all – just the next right thing.

CHAPTER V

Common Challenges and Real-World Reframes

You're not doing it wrong – it's just really hard.

Challenge: “I’m not bonding with my baby the way I thought I would.”

Reframe: Bonding isn’t always instant – sometimes it builds slowly over time, like any relationship. You’re not broken, and you’re not failing.

Try skin-to-skin contact, talking to your baby, and asking for support when you need it. Connection can be quiet, messy, and gradual – and still be love.

Challenge: “Everyone says to rest, but I can’t sleep even when I try.”

Reframe: Hormonal shifts, intrusive thoughts, and anxiety can keep you wide awake. This is more common than you think.

Focus on rest over sleep: lie down in a dark room, listen to soft music, or do breathwork. If insomnia persists, reach out – postpartum mood disorders often show up as sleep disruption first.

Challenge: “Everyone keeps telling me what I should do.”

Reframe: Advice (even well-meaning) can feel overwhelming or judgmental.

Trust your instincts. Smile, nod, and say, “That’s interesting,” then do what feels right for you and your baby. You are the expert of your baby and your body.

Challenge: “I feel off, but I don’t think it’s bad enough to get help.”

Reframe: You don’t have to wait until you’re at your lowest to get support. Postpartum mood disorders (like depression, anxiety, rage, or OCD) can look different for everyone.

If you’re feeling persistently sad, anxious, disconnected, angry, or numb – **reach out.** You deserve help early, not only in crisis.

Challenge: “I feel invisible now that the baby is here.”

Reframe: It’s common for new parents (especially birthing parents) to feel overlooked.

Your needs still matter. You’re allowed to take up space. Your identity isn’t erased – it’s evolving. Ask for care. Let others hold you, too.

CHAPTER VI

Final Thoughts

The postpartum period isn't just the "after" – it's a chapter all its own, filled with healing, learning, and becoming. You're navigating massive changes physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, all while caring for a brand new human. It's a lot – even when it's beautiful. Especially when it's hard.

There's no one "right" way to do postpartum. There's only your way – rooted in your needs, your values, your culture, and your capacity. Whether your days are filled with baby snuggles or tears (or both), you're not alone, and you're not doing it wrong.

You deserve rest, nourishment, help, and love. You deserve to feel like yourself again – or to discover who this new version of you is becoming.

As a postpartum doula and wellness support practitioner, I'm here for all of it. Whether you need practical help, emotional support, nourishing meals, a nap, or just someone to witness your experience without judgment – I've got you.



If you're not sure what kind of support you need yet, that's okay. We can figure it out together.

- **Visit my website** to explore postpartum packages, sleep support, and wellness resources
- **Reach out anytime** – I'm just a message away, and always happy to chat (no pressure!)

You are doing more than enough.
Be gentle with yourself.

You've got this – and I've got you.

With warmth,

- Kat Thompson