



Melisa Schuster, LMSW

psychotherapy for the childbearing years

Postpartum Planning Worksheet

Use this guide to help make your postpartum preparations. Making sure you have enough hands-on and emotional support in the first few weeks after baby's birth will help to reduce your risk of Postpartum Depression.

Be sure to stay in bed 7–10 days after the birth. The more you rest, the faster you will regain your strength. Making sure you have someone else to take care of household tasks will help you to stay in bed to rest. Surprisingly, this is often too much for the partner alone to handle, especially if there are older children. Remember he may also be sleep deprived and is adjusting to the new demands of parenthood. If you do not have a mother, mother-in-law, sister, or friend who can come to help, consider hiring a doula to help with these tasks.

Who will come stay with you the first week after birth to help with meals, laundry, and household tasks?

Having friends bring meals three to four times a week will lighten your load considerably. Ask a friend to serve as the coordinator to sign friends up for a specific day. Some church or moms' groups do this for each other as a matter of course. See if you can get connected with them. Consider having friends bring a frozen meal to the baby shower instead of or in addition to gifts. If these suggestions are not possible, consider making meals and freezing them during your pregnancy so that you don't have to worry about cooking during the first few weeks of parenthood.

Who will coordinate your "meal fairies?"

Adjusting to the demands of 24-hour care of a newborn can be challenging. And doing it on little or interrupted sleep can make it feel downright overwhelming. It's important to remember that these feelings are normal and you will adjust over time. But in the meantime it's good to know on whom you can call during those challenging times. Be sure to list family members and friends who would be willing to put down what they are doing to come to your aid quickly if necessary.

List the names and telephone numbers of 4 people you can count on to help after the baby's birth.

Women know that when they become mothers their lives will change dramatically and that they may have to sacrifice some of their own needs temporarily to meet the needs of their newborn. But many women go too far and *eliminate* from their lives the things that help "recharge their batteries." This is a mistake. Although you may not have the long periods of time to yourself that you used to, it is still important to find time to do the activities that you enjoy and that remind you of who you are outside of the mothering role. Examples might be: reading, listening to music, taking a nature walk, soaking in a hot bath, doing a craft or hobby, or going for coffee with a friend.

List three things you find relaxing, rejuvenating, or inspiring that you can do after birth to take care of yourself.

New and experienced mothers need support in their mothering role. Especially if you stay home with your child(ren) during maternity leave or throughout your childbearing years, you will need contact with other adults and other parents you can bounce ideas off of. Having ongoing emotional support is critical to feeling good about yourself. Find others who have similar parenting philosophies to get maximum benefit.

Choose one mother/baby group you will attend in the first two months after birth to connect with other parents. List it here with the telephone number.

Sleep is essential for good functioning. Although it's true that taking care of a newborn around the clock interferes with sleep, work to get as much sleep as possible. It will help to prevent Postpartum Depression. Make sleep a priority. It's easy for new mothers to feel overwhelmed with baby care and household tasks. **Sleep when the baby sleeps.** It's okay if the dishes don't get done. **Go to bed early.** You do need time to connect with your partner and time to yourself, but don't sacrifice sleep to get it.

Check off the strategies you will consider using after the baby is born to maximize your sleep.

- Go to bed early
- Sleep when the baby sleeps
- Have someone take care of the baby while you sleep
- Father takes one nighttime feeding

This is the time to continue paying attention to nutrition. If breastfeeding, you will need 500 extra calories per day and plenty of protein. Continue taking prenatal vitamins. Drink plenty of water. Avoid caffeine and alcohol, which can negatively affect your sleep. Some women find that taking a complex B vitamin and fish oil capsules help them to stabilize their mood after childbirth.

Be sure to have the following on hand:

- 500 extra calories/day
- Extra protein
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol
- Prenatal Vitamins
- B Complex Vitamins
- Fish Oil Capsules