



ATLAS *of* MOTHERHOOD

THE FIRST FORTY  
DAYS

*For Atlas of Motherhood by Kate Harrison*



## KATE HARRISON

Hi, I'm Kate. I'm a mother and Naturopath and Ayurvedic Postpartum Doula who supports women on their journey to and through pregnancy, birth, postpartum and beyond using herbal and nutritional medicine as well as traditional postpartum practices. I use herbal medicine, nutrition and traditional practices to support mothers to prepare for postpartum and beyond with an east meets west approach and a whole lot of heart and passion for what I do.

*[littleyarrow.com](http://littleyarrow.com)*



# THE CONCEPT OF THE FIRST FORTY DAYS

The first 40 days is a universal concept about the postpartum period. Many traditional cultures around the world have this concept of the first 40 days after birth being a really sacred window and important time.

## Following childbirth:

- you're healing from the childbirth itself
- your physical wounds that need healing
- your uterus is contracting back down
- you're bleeding for around 40 days
- your milk is coming in,
- your hormones are changing: your estrogen and cortisol dropping, while your prolactin and your oxytocin are increasing.

Those first 40 days are crucial in terms of helping you to adjust to motherhood. During those first 40 days, you're learning to breastfeed (if you choose to breastfeed) and bond with your baby. You're also healing and recovering physically and emotionally from the birthing process.

## WHY FORTY DAYS?

The reason for the time period of 40 days is because it usually takes about 40 days for the bleeding to stop, your hormones to resettle, your body to establish your milk supply and get into your breastfeeding routine, and it also takes that time for the uterus to contract back down as well. In Western cultures, we also have that six week postpartum checkup checkpoint, so it's considered that time frame in a lot of cultures when things begin to rebalance after pregnancy and birth.

# POSTPARTUM IS FOREVER

While there is the concept of the first 40 days, it's important to note that your postpartum journey doesn't end there. You may believe that postpartum means immediately after birth, and in a sense it does. However, postpartum is forever because we have forever changed. Postpartum is for the rest of your life and there are so many things that affect your journey. Many mothers find that if they don't receive enough care in those early days after birth, or there are any kind of complications, that these issues can affect them lifelong. The saying 40 days for 40 years is because those first 40 days postpartum will affect you for the next 40 years.

For those reasons, many cultures have this concept of a “lying in” or a “confinement period” so that you can have the time to heal and recover. And cocooning yourself protects not only you, but your baby as well. Baby's are born immature and go from a dark, quiet, little space to the outside world that is full of sounds, light, colors, and noise. 40 days helps your baby to have a smooth and gentle transition into the world.

Womb	World
Dark	Light
Muffled sounds	Loud noises
Constant warm temperature	Fluctuating temperature
Constant nutrition	Hunger & thirst
Confined space	Lots of space
Aquatic	Air
Inability to smell	Many different smells
Constant contact with mother	Dramatically reduced contact
Constantly 'held'	Held far less
Naked	Clothed
All surroundings soft and warm	Many surroundings hard and cold



# YOUR VILLAGE OF SUPPORT

It's important to remember that in looking at traditional cultures, during these 40 days, you would have village support and people around you during this time. However, that's often not the case in modern society.

**It's important** that you take the time during your pregnancy to set up your support system for postpartum and what that will look like for you.

In what ways do you want to be supported?

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Are there things that you know you will need help with?

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# SUPPORT SYSTEMS FOR THE FIRST FORTY DAYS

Some of the support systems you can call upon during postpartum:

MEDICAL	Ob-gyn, Dietician, Primary care provider, Pelvic floor therapist
LACTATION	Local lactation clinics and consultants
FRIENDS	Your most trusted friends, friends who are moms
FAMILY	Partner, your most trusted family members (of your family or your partners), a grandmother you feel comfortable with
LOCAL RESOURCES	Car seat checks, churches, places that do free grocery pick-up, mom groups that get together
MENTAL HEALTH	Therapist, psychiatrist, support groups for moms and breastfeeding

Who is in your circle that can support you postpartum?

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## MEDICAL PROVIDERS THAT CAN SUPPORT YOU:

Postpartum Doula:

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Lactation Consultants:

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La Leche League:

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Babywearing Group:

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Mental Health Therapists (that take your insurance):

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Parent Groups:

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Pelvic Floor Therapists:

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Physical Therapy:

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Massage Therapist:

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Chiropractor:

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Your OB/Midwife/Doctor Number:

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Baby's Doctor:

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Any other relevant information you may need to write down:

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HOW TO  
PREPARE FOR  
THE FIRST  
FORTY DAYS  
POSTPARTUM

During pregnancy, we are often focused on preparing for the birth and preparing what we need for baby, and we often don't think about what we need after the baby's born.

## 1

## FOOD

Stock your pantry, fridge and freezer with food for the postpartum period and understanding what kind of foods you will need for recovery.

- Include protein sources in your diet as they help repair tissue, give you fuel, and are the basis of our hormones and our neurotransmitters (lean meat, eggs, nuts, seeds, greek yogurt, feta cheese, beans & legumes).
- Limit snacking on crackers and carbohydrates.
- Include Omega 3 in your diet. Your brain is sucked dry of Omega three in that final trimester replenishing those stores and breastmilk is so rich in fatty acids. (fish, nuts, seeds, like flax seeds and chia seeds, walnuts)
- Warming, nourishing, grounding foods (soups, stews, and casseroles that you can freeze, so that when you're exhausted and hungry, you can just pull something out of the freezer that's healthy because you most likely won't have the capacity to cook a meal from scratch postpartum.

## 2

## NURSING BASKET

Before your baby arrives, prepare a nursing basket that you keep next to your feeding chair full of healthy snacks and include things that will help you sustain your energy. This will be a basket that you can take with you wherever you go in the house.

- Muesli bars
- Protein balls
- Nuts and seeds
- Trail mixes
- Thermos for your tea
- Drink Bottle (try to have one glass of water every time you sit down to nurse)
- Magazines
- Books
- Headphones for podcasts
- Journal
- Heat packs for after birth cramps

### 3

## HERBS FOR HEALING

### Herbs for postpartum healing:

- Calendula
- Lavender
- Tea Tree Oil
- Lavender Oil

### How to use herbs for postpartum healing:

- Make spritz bottles that you can spray down there to help with healing.
- Use them in the bath to help heal after birth, whether it's your cesarean site or perineum soreness.
- Gently soak cotton pads in cold chamomile tea and put them in the freezer to help with healing down there.

### 4

## ASKING YOURSELF WHAT YOU WILL NEED

Take the time to ask yourself questions around the types of things that you will need postpartum. Pregnancy is the ideal time to start asking "*what do I actually need postpartum*" and getting it ready because it's so much easier if troubles come up in the postpartum period and you're prepared rather than having issues in the middle of the night when you're sleep deprived.

**An example would be if you are planning to breastfeed, you could ask yourself the following questions:**

What do I need for breastfeeding?

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What kind of herbs can help support milk production?

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What if I get blocked up mastitis? What can I take? What are some things I can stock up on?

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## COME BACK TO THESE POSTPARTUM PRINCIPLES THROUGHOUT YOUR MOTHERHOOD JOURNEY

Traditionally, there's universal principles around postpartum care that typically involves rest, support, nourishing foods, herbs and community. These principles are important for those immediate 40 days postpartum, but they are also beneficial no matter where you are in your postpartum journey.

If you have a toddler and you're feeling depleted and exhausted, reverting back to those principles of gathering your tribe, asking for help, resting, implementing herbs, and eating nourishing grounding, whole foods.

So I think it's really important to note that a lot of the principles and practices around postpartum are to be used for any time where you feel that you need that replenishment, nourishment, and care.





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