

Supporting the postpartum period:

A whole person care approach

Welcome to the fourth trimester

The postpartum period, often called the "fourth trimester," marks a time of significant physical, emotional, and psychological transitions as your body and life adjust to the new reality of motherhood. While this time can bring challenges such as fatigue, breastfeeding struggles, emotional shifts, and identity changes, remember: you are not alone. Strategies, support, and resources are available to help you navigate this journey.



What is whole person care in the postpartum period?

Postpartum whole person care is a comprehensive approach to recovery that addresses the body, mind, and environment. This approach prioritizes nutrition, physical movement, emotional well-being, and quality sleep—all within a safe, supportive environment. Working closely with your healthcare provider, you can create a personalized, holistic plan to facilitate the transition into motherhood.

Personalized assessment

Your provider may recommend personalized lab testing to monitor recovery after childbirth and any conditions that arose during pregnancy. This could include:

- **Complete blood count (CBC):** Your provider may recommend a CBC to assess for and manage anemia
- **Blood sugar:** Glucose tolerance testing is recommended 6–12 weeks postpartum for women who had gestational diabetes during pregnancy.
- **Thyroid function:** Thyroid hormone levels are often assessed in women with pre-existing or gestational thyroid abnormalities.
- **Nutrient assessment:** Nutrition assessments may be used to screen for deficiencies (like iron and omega-3 fatty acids).
- **Gut microbiome analysis:** These analyses assess gut bacteria as they pertain to holistic maternal health

Lifestyle foundations for postpartum recovery

Personalized assessment

- Adopt a balanced, nutrient-dense, whole-food diet to support recovery and milk production. Eat a diverse variety of fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, whole grains, nuts, and seeds.
- Prioritize food rich in nutrients that support breastmilk production, promote maternal health, and provide essential nourishment for infant development:
 - **Calcium:** Dairy, leafy green vegetables, almonds, and bone-in fish
 - **Iron:** Red meat, poultry, organ meats, beans, leafy green vegetables, and fortified cereals
 - **DHA:** Fatty fish and fortified eggs
 - **Vitamin D:** Fortified milk, fish oil, eggs, and mushrooms
 - **Folate:** Leafy greens, fruits, nuts, beans, seafood, eggs, and dairy
- Consume at least 25 g of fiber every day through fiber-rich foods to support healthy bowel movements. Examples include:
 - **Wheat bran:** 14 g per ½ cup
 - **Cooked lima beans:** 13.2 g per cup
 - **Cooked lentils:** 7.8 g per ½ cup
 - **Broccoli:** 5.2 g per cup
 - **Kale:** 4.7 g per cup
 - **Raspberries:** 8 g per cup
 - **Apple:** 4.8 g per medium fruit
 - **Pumpkin seeds:** 5.2 g per oz
 - **Flax seeds:** 2.8 g per tbs
 - **Almonds:** 3.5 g per oz
- To prevent dehydration, drink 68–91 oz (2–2.5 L) of water daily. Set reminders to sip water consistently throughout the day and eat hydrating foods (e.g., cucumbers and watermelon) to meet fluid requirements.



Movement and physical recovery

- Prioritize physical healing and allow your body time to heal and rest after childbirth.
- Once cleared by your healthcare provider, begin reintroducing light activities, such as walking or gentle stretching.
- Gradually increase exercise intensity and duration as your body adjusts to physical activity again. Work up to at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity, such as walking, swimming, or cycling, per week.
- Additionally, incorporate muscle-strengthening exercises, especially those that target the pelvic floor muscles, at least twice a week. Examples include Kegel exercises, squats, and bridges.

Postpartum-safe exercises

Once you’ve been cleared for exercise by your provider, consider incorporating some physical activity into your routine. Here are some gentle, postpartum-safe exercises to help you rebuild strength and support recovery after childbirth.

Type of exercise	Description
Resistance training	Resistance training, such as lifting weights or using resistance bands, strengthens bones and muscles.
Swimming/water aerobics	Water aerobics can provide a full-body workout. The water supports your weight, helping reduce the risk of injury and muscle strain. It's important to check with your provider before swimming postpartum to ensure your body has healed properly and to reduce the risk of infection.
Walking	Brisk walking and hiking are low-impact, total-body workouts that are easy on the joints and muscles.
Yoga	Yoga can help you manage stress and improve mobility and strength. This form of exercise focuses on breathwork and mindfulness.

Mental and emotional well-being

- It’s normal to experience a range of emotions after childbirth. Pay attention to signs of postpartum depression or anxiety, such as persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, worry, or difficulty bonding with your baby.
- Ask for help when needed. Lean on your partner for emotional and physical support and reach out to your network of friends, family, and community.
- Professional mental health services like therapy or counseling can provide additional support.
- Practice self-compassion. Be gentle with yourself, acknowledge you’re doing your best, and recognize your achievements.



Types of self-care

Self-care includes a variety of practices, such as:

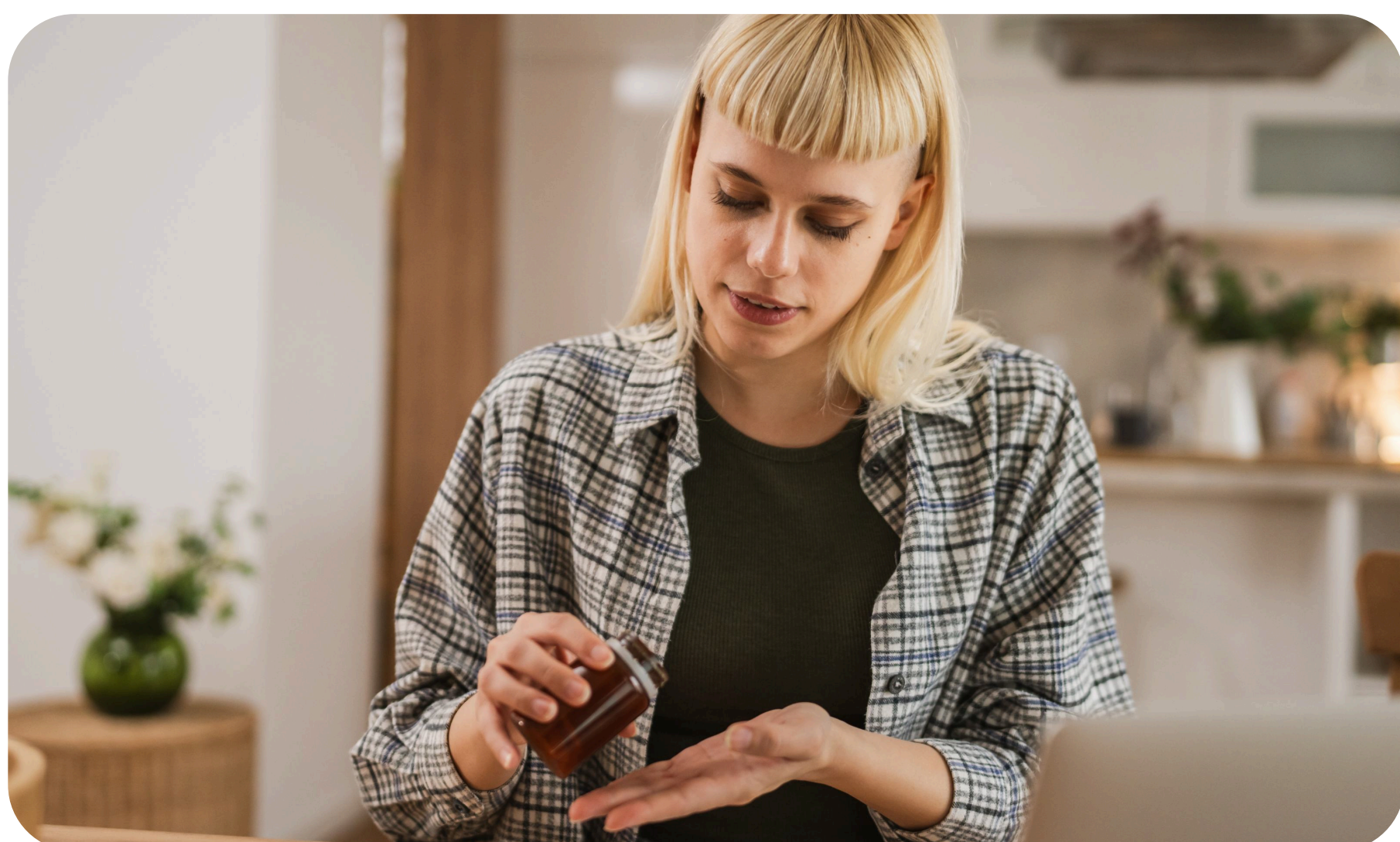
 Mental health	 Physical health	 Environmental health	 Aspirational health
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Managing stress with relaxing activities (hobbies, listening to music, meditation, breathing exercises)• Participating in social activities and building supportive relationships• Getting adequate sleep and rest	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eating a healthy diet and engaging in regular physical activity• Maintaining good personal hygiene• Seeking medical assistance when ill	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintaining a healthy and safe environment (a clean home)• Spending time in nature (gardening, walking outdoors)• Taking time away from screens (computer, smartphone, television)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Carving out time for a hobby or self-improvement• Seeking out professional development and/or mentorship• Working on a budget or financial plan

Sleep and rest

- Many women experience sleep disturbances in the postpartum period due to hormonal shifts, emotional adjustments, and infant feeding schedules. However, prioritizing sleep is crucial for your physical recovery and emotional resilience during this period.
- Sleep when you can. Try to sleep when your baby sleeps, even during daytime naps.
- Ask for help from a partner, family member, or trusted friend for daytime respite or help with night feedings.
- Avoid drinking alcohol and caffeinated beverages late in the day, which can interfere with sleep at night.
- Calming music, gentle daytime exercise, stress-reduction techniques, and acupressure can improve sleep quality.
- Implement sleep-conscious habits into your nightly routine: Try to establish a consistent bedtime, limit screen time in the evenings, and create a comfortable bedroom environment.

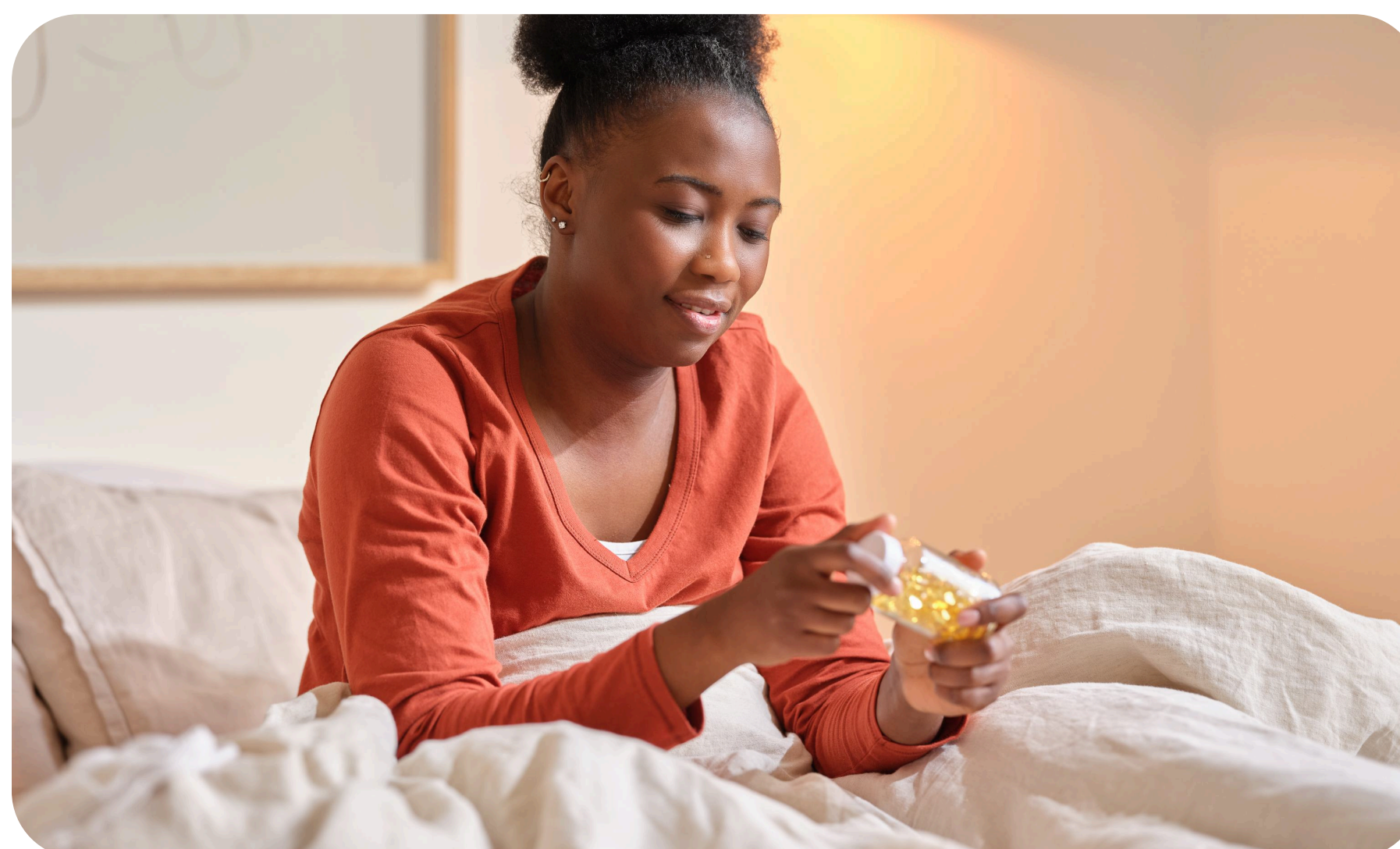
Targeted supplement support

Targeted, evidence-based supplements can complement lifestyle practices to address nutrient gaps in your diet and help alleviate specific physical and emotional postpartum symptoms. Be sure to talk with your healthcare provider about personalized recommendations tailored to your individual health needs and status.



Postnatal nutrients

- Folic acid
- Vitamin A
- Vitamin C
- Vitamin D
- Iron
- Calcium
- Magnesium
- Zinc
- Omega-3 essential fatty acids (especially DHA)



Sleep support

- B vitamins
- Melatonin
- Chamomile
- L-theanine
- Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*)



Cognitive support

- Choline
- Phosphatidylserine
- Water hyssop (*Bacopa monnieri*)
- Lion's mane mushroom
- Lutein/zeaxanthin



Final thoughts

It's normal to feel overwhelmed during the fourth trimester. Recovery is a process, not a destination; your body is healing, adjusting, and finding a new rhythm—and it's okay to take your time. Use this handout as a helpful resource alongside the care and guidance from your healthcare provider. With the right support, you can thrive during this transformative time.

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