

December 2019 E-Newsletter: The “After” Birth Plan

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Birth Plan

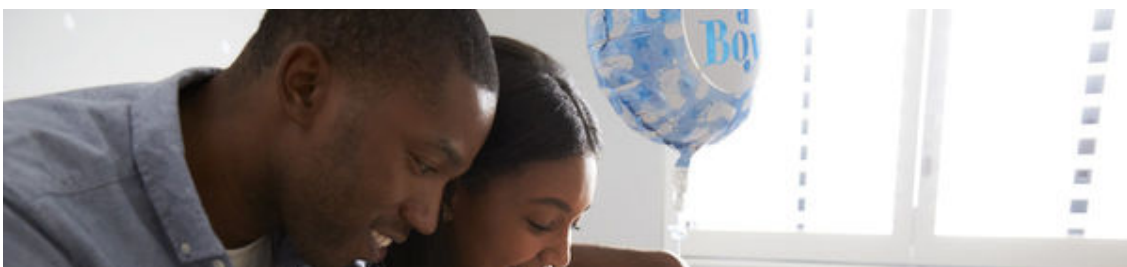
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Pregnancy is exciting. Everything about it is miraculous and ever changing with anticipation and a lot of planning. Most couples start planning the day they find out they are expecting.

The pregnancy usually is suspected at home and today, is easily confirmed with home pregnancy tests. The first prenatal visit is counted down to reconfirm the suspicion. The due date is calculated, and the first ultrasound scheduled. At around 20 weeks, the anatomy screen is performed and if they couple so chooses, they can usually discover the gender at that visit. WOW! Then, the planning really begins. Names and outfits and nursery colors and considered. The showers and brunches are planned and the prenatal care continues. Mom is watching her nutrition and following all the instructions. Nothing on earth seems more important that this upcoming birth.

The childbirth education process begins and the stage is set. The “Birth Plan” is developed. All the wants and desires for the birth experience are explored. This is one of the most important events in a woman (and her partner’s) life. And it most certainly is. The labor and birth commence and the baby is born. The birth plan was important. This author humbly believes that but what is even more important in this process is the “After Birth” plan.

We are falling short, in this country, with properly supporting our new mothers and their newborns. There are many reasons for this as we, as a population, have become more transient and live all over the world. We no longer have our immediate and extended family right down the street or across town. Even if we do live close by, there seems to be less and less folks available to actually take on the role as mentor and helper to new mothers. We all have to step up, collectively.





There are a multitude of reasons having someone in very close proximity to a new mother and her newborn is important. The new mother should not have to worry about anything but herself and her baby. She should be able to “hole up” in her bedroom, make it her castle to close out the outside world. By protecting this space for her, she can get to know her baby, nurse her baby without interruption, sleep and rest, rejuvenate from the labor and birth and feel her way in her new role as a mother. As she is transitioning to this new role, someone else must take care of the house, the shopping, the meals, the other children and any other tasks that need to be done. One issue that must be a priority in these early weeks is prevention of maternal exhaustion. When a new mother is thrown back into the fray too soon, she cannot juggle her needs, her babies needs and take care of usual daily tasks. She will soon feel overwhelmed and overloaded. She will become fatigued and anxious and that can turn into exhaustion, true anxiety and depression. This is true for every woman that has had a baby. Some may agree and say they managed somehow. Some will say they wished they had asked for help. Some will absolutely admit that they felt like they had no control whatsoever. Some felt helpless. Some wondered where everyone was. Even experienced mothers feel this way. We cannot allow this to happen. We must prepare better.

In my years of practice, I would always ask: “Who is coming and how long can they stay?” The answers I got were: “My Mother is coming for a few days. I don’t know. My husband/partner has taken a week off from work. My family lives in Seattle (ex). I have 2 weeks of frozen meals made”, etc, etc. I think anyone reading this will get the drift. Most of the answers were totally unsatisfactory. Health care providers must ask these questions. They must encourage an “after birth plan” and follow up later in pregnancy to make sure the mother has made arrangements appropriately and has the proper support

she needs and deserves.

We spend more time planning baby showers and brunches than we do our first 4-6 weeks after we give birth. We have our priorities all wrong. Women are better cared for in third world countries by their close family members and friends that we do in the US. They may not have the resources we do but these mentors and caregivers do provide their time. Most believe that a new mother must be cared for and mentored for 6 weeks. This means that they are directly cared for the first 2 weeks and over time (usually over the 4 weeks) they can gradually stand on their own two feet in this new role. I wonder what this simple plan would do to our maternal morbidity and mortality rate if we had informed, caring people surrounding us for the first 6 weeks....Folks that truly care, that observe, can be our advocates, would report anything out of the ordinary and get us to care quickly, if we needed it.



The After-Birth Plan? Here are the basics:

- Direct in-home help for the first 2 weeks
- Direct or intermittent help for weeks 3-4
- Intermittent help weeks 5-6
- Planned help with other children on weeks 3-6
- New Mother's "Mother" (or surrogate) if available, the first 2 weeks

- Mother in law, other relatives, after the first 2 weeks
- List of chores posted for caregiver: Meals, shopping, cleaning, laundry
- Helpers are not “baby holders”, they come to work
- It is helpful if helpers have had a baby, but not mandatory
- Mothers and Mother in laws, OR Surrogates are asked to make flexible travel arrangements (if not local) as they are needed after the birth. They may need to let their employers know way in advance so they can be flexible when the birth occurs.
- If family members are unavailable, it would be necessary to reach out to church groups, mother’s groups, neighbors, local friends or consider hiring a postpartum doula.
- Plan the “team” after the second trimester of pregnancy (around 28 weeks) and never decline any offer of help, meals or assistance.
- Join a MOPS group in your area. www.mops.org
- Investigate other mothers/moms groups in your area.

Planning ahead and lining up postpartum support is one of the most important things an expectant couple can do. The “After Birth” Plan is vital to their wellbeing. It will make a huge difference for our new mothers and their babies in this generation and the next.

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