

The fourth trimester: New mom survival guide



Geisinger



Welcome, mama! We're glad you're here.

From finding out you're going to be a mom to meeting your baby for the very first time and taking them home, every moment counts during your pregnancy. And we're here to support you through all of them.

Here, we've gathered some helpful advice and tips to help you prepare for the postpartum period (the fourth trimester) and life at home with your newborn. From self-care tips and healthy snack ideas to a handy log to track your baby's diaper changes, here's what you'll find in this guide:

- Postpartum recovery: Tips for healing and self-care..... Page 2
- Breastfeeding: What to expect Page 3
- Newborn care tracker: Eat, sleep, diaper changes Pages 4-5
- Feeding: Common challenges and when to seek help Page 6
- Tackling common baby sleep challenges Page 7
- Baby blues and postpartum depression: Help is here Page 8
- Postpartum diet: Easy, healthy eats.....Pages 9-10
- Movement: Exercise after birth.....Page 11
- Your baby's first visit with the pediatricianPage 12

Postpartum recovery: Tips for healing and self-care

Make time for self-care.

While caring for your baby, don't forget to take care of yourself, too. It's an important part of your postpartum care and recovery. Here are some ways you can practice self-care:

Follow your doctor's orders.

Follow your doctor's care instructions. And be sure to prioritize your follow-up appointments.

Get as much rest as you can.

Get some rest when you put your baby down for a nap or for bed. Your body is recovering from pregnancy and labor.

Accept help from friends and family.

Loved ones can be a big help during this time. However, don't be afraid to let them know when you don't want visitors.

Eat healthy meals.

Be sure to eat a well-balanced diet and stay hydrated. If you're breastfeeding, eating healthy fats (like nuts and avocados) can help boost your milk production.

Get outside.

Taking a walk around your neighborhood can boost your mood and energy levels.

Spend some quality time with your partner.

A new baby can mean less quality time with your partner if you have one. Carve out a little alone time — and don't feel guilty about it.

Join a mommy support group.

Joining a support group can connect you with other moms going through the same changes and provide much-needed support.

Take it slowly.

Your body has done a lot of work, so be kind to yourself and give yourself some time to heal and regroup. And don't hesitate to talk to your doctor about any concerns you may have — remember, your postpartum recovery timeline and journey is unique.

Postpartum recovery checklist

Here are a few items we suggest having on hand to help your recovery go smoothly:

- Acetaminophen (pain reliever)
- Stool softener
- Maxi pads
- Peri bottle
- Ice packs and witch hazel pads
- Comfy, cotton underwear
- Nipple cream
- Nursing bras and pads
- Heating pad



Breastfeeding: What to expect

While choosing how to feed your baby is a personal choice, many new moms choose to breastfeed because of the benefits for both mom and baby.

Preparing yourself

If you're considering breastfeeding your baby, talk about it with your healthcare provider. They can answer questions and connect you to breastfeeding classes to learn more.

Breastfeeding may take some trial and error, but with some planning, perseverance and a bit of help at the start, you can successfully nurse your baby.

Getting started

Right after you give birth, you'll spend some important bonding time with your baby through skin-to-skin contact. Within the first hour, specially trained nurses or lactation consultants can help you breastfeed for the first time by helping the baby latch on to your nipple. They'll also provide helpful tips as you both begin this new journey.

Following your first breastfeeding session, you should feed your baby "on demand" when she or he shows signs of hunger. However, you may need to initiate feedings in the first few days — about every one to three hours.

Over the first few weeks, you'll notice that the texture and color of your milk changes in three phases:

Phase 1: First comes colostrum, a nutrient-rich milk that helps to protect your baby against bacteria and viruses. Colostrum also serves as a laxative and will help your baby with his or her first bowel movement.

Phase 2: Next up is transitional milk, which is a blend of mature milk and colostrum.

Phase 3: Finally, your mature milk will arrive, usually about two weeks after your baby is born.

To prepare, you may want to buy some supplies that can make breastfeeding a little easier, such as:

- Breast pads
- Nursing bras
- Nipple creams
- Ice packs
- A pillow to support you and your baby
- A breast pump, which can be used to give your baby stored breast milk even when you can't be present for the feeding.



Getting help with breastfeeding

From poor latch to mastitis (inflammation of the breast) and more, help and support are available. Here are some resources to turn to:

- Your baby's doctor
- A lactation consultant
- A breastfeeding support group
- A close friend or relative who has nursed
- La Leche League International (lille.org)

If you've sought help and continue to struggle with breastfeeding, it may be time to talk with your doctor about supplementing with formula or formula-feeding. And remember: Keeping your baby well fed is what's most important.

Newborn care tracker: Eat, sleep, diaper changes



After bringing your baby home, it's recommended to keep track of things like feedings, sleep patterns and diaper changes.

Not only will this help you recognize what's normal and what's not, you can also use this to answer any questions your doctor may ask at your newborn's appointments. Track what makes sense to you, but here are a few suggestions:



Feedings

- If breastfeeding, which breast you nursed on last.
- If bottle feeding, how many ounces your baby drank.
- If your baby spits up and how often.



Sleep Patterns

- When your baby sleeps and for how long.



Diaper Changes

- Time you changed your baby's diaper.
- If the diaper change was pee or poop.
- Anything that seems off to you.

Newborn care tracker: Eat, sleep, diaper changes

Time	Feedings	Time	Hours Slept	Time	Changes	Time	My Day
Total Feedings:		Total Hours slept:		Total Changes, wet:		Notes:	
Notes:		Notes:		Changes, poopy:			
				Notes:			

Feeding: Common challenges and when to seek help

For the first four to six months of your baby's life, they will consume only breast milk or formula. And around four to six months of age, you can start to introduce solid foods.

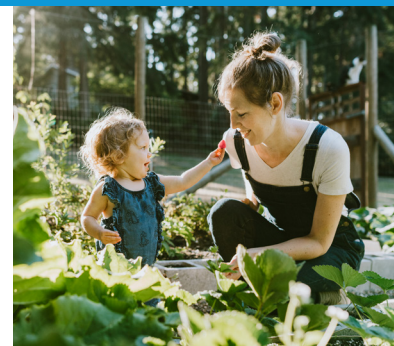
During this time, it's important to remember that your baby is just learning, just like you are, how and when to feed. Here are some common challenges and when to call your pediatrician.

Common newborn feeding challenges

Feeding challenges are common and help and support are available. Some common challenges to watch out for are:

- Taking a long time to feed
- Falling asleep during feedings
- Fussiness during feedings
- Arching their back while eating
- Spitting up
- Not latching properly
- Refusing a bottle
- Gas or crying after a feeding

Once you start introducing solid foods, you may find that some of the feeding challenges you had before resolved themselves. However, a baby's first foods may bring on new adventures.



Starting solid foods

Watching as your baby tries new tastes (and textures) for the first time can be exciting. Once your pediatrician has told you that your child is ready for solids, start slowly and remember to:

- Introduce one new food at a time, about every three to four days.
- Offer solid foods before a bottle or breast.
- Watch for allergic reactions, such as a rash or vomiting.
- Rotate between different foods, including fruits and vegetables.
- Watch for your baby's natural feeding cues — they will let you know when they're not hungry.
- Never push too hard to make your baby eat.

It may take several attempts before your baby accepts a particular food. The important thing is that you keep trying.



What to do when your baby has trouble with feedings

If your little one is having any feeding challenges, make an appointment with your pediatrician. Feeding issues can lead to failure to thrive, dehydration, developmental delays and other health concerns. But with some help, you can get your baby back on track.

Tackling common baby sleep challenges

If your baby isn't sleeping, you're likely not sleeping — and that can be tough. This is common, at least for the first few months. Here are some common sleep issues and tips for surviving them:

Baby sleep regressions

Sleep regressions may last anywhere from two to six weeks. Babies who previously slept well may start to wake up during the night or fight sleep altogether. During a sleep regression, you may notice that your baby is more fussy than normal.

Sleep regressions are thought to be caused by major developmental leaps or growth spurts and occur most commonly at:

4 — 8 — 12 — 18 — 24
months months months months months

Survival tip: Try putting your baby to bed a little earlier, covering windows during the summer months or dressing them in warmer pajamas. Focus on creating a consistent bedtime routine (and sticking to it) and don't be afraid to reach out to your pediatrician for guidance.

Sleeping anywhere but the crib

Some babies will sleep in your arms, the car seat — basically anywhere but their crib. However, babies should only be sleeping in their crib, where they can sleep soundly and safely.

Survival tip: If your baby is six months of age or older, you can try sleep training, a process of helping your them learn how to fall asleep (and stay asleep) on their own throughout the night. Start by putting your baby to bed when they're drowsy and leaving them alone for longer stretches until they no longer need help going to sleep. During bedtime or naptime, don't jump the moment your baby cries for you or allow too much interaction. This will help your baby self-soothe.



Wide awake at bedtime

Babies aren't born knowing when to fall asleep or when to be awake. They need your help to learn this behavior. If your little one is still awake at bedtime, a too long or too late naptime could be to blame. Or if they didn't nap, they may be overtired.

Survival tip: Sleep consistency is key. Try to create a routine where your baby goes to sleep and wakes up at the same time each day. Make sure he or she has a clean diaper and comfy pajamas, turn down the lights and keep things quiet around bedtime. This will help your baby start to feel sleepy. And remember, change won't happen overnight, but creating a routine will be worthwhile.



Baby blues and postpartum depression: Help is here

It's common to feel a lot of emotions, including sadness, after giving birth, but some new moms experience something heavier called postpartum depression.

About 80 percent of moms with newborns experience what's called baby blues — a short-lived period of strong emotions and mood swings triggered by hormonal changes — after childbirth. However, for up to 20 percent of moms with newborns, baby blues may linger longer than two weeks and evolve into postpartum depression. Dads can experience this, too.

What is postpartum depression?

Postpartum depression is a severe condition that can develop after childbirth. While it can develop any time during your baby's first year, many new moms (and dads) will feel symptoms of postpartum depression during the first three weeks after their baby is born.

Symptoms of postpartum depression

Knowing the symptoms can help you spot postpartum depression. Symptoms may vary from person to person and, in some cases, day to day. Symptoms can include:

- Anxiety and/or panic attacks
- Depressed mood or sadness
- Crying frequently
- Feelings of worthlessness, worrying that you are a bad parent
- Withdrawing from friends and family
- A sense of hopelessness or that things won't get better
- Sudden mood swings
- Difficulty concentrating
- Intense irritability
- Lack of interest in or difficulty bonding with your baby
- Thoughts of harming yourself or your baby



You're not alone: Seek help

New moms and dads can be ashamed to admit they don't always feel happy. Instead, they may feel sad, anxious, worried and even numb. There's nothing to be ashamed of, and you don't have to face it alone. It's important to let your (or your baby's) healthcare provider know how you feel, and to have a conversation about how your mood is affecting you.

If you feel any symptoms of postpartum depression, or "off" in any way, talk to your doctor (or your baby's pediatrician) as soon as possible. With prompt treatment, you can start feeling better.

Postpartum diet: Easy, healthy eats

Having a newborn can be downright exhausting. A healthy diet is important not only for your healing, but for boosting your energy levels when sleep deprivation is high.

During this time, focus on meals and snacks that are healthy and easy. Eat whole foods like fruits, veggies, whole grains, lean proteins and healthy fats. And drink plenty of water.

If you're breastfeeding, you'll want to consume an extra 300 to 500 calories per day and you may feel thirstier. Be sure to have a water bottle and some healthy snacks nearby.

Turkey stuffed peppers

This healthy, delicious meal can be prepped and frozen, so all you have to do is thaw and bake it in the oven.

Makes: 6 servings

Ingredients:

- 1 lb. lean ground turkey
- 6 bell peppers, cut in half and seeded
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 3 cups tomato sauce, no salt added (or use your own homemade tomato sauce)
- 1 cup shredded 2% cheddar cheese
- 1.5 cups cooked brown rice

Nutritional information:

Nutrition per serving = 2 pepper halves; calories: 290 calories; total fat: 11 grams; saturated fat: 4.5 grams; total carbohydrates: 25 grams; fiber: 5 grams; total protein: 23 grams; sodium: 218 mg



Preparation:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit, if planning to bake after preparing.
2. Prepare brown rice according to instructions on the package and set aside.
3. Mince garlic and dice onions.
4. Add the minced garlic, diced onions and ground turkey to a large sauté pan and cook on medium-high until ground turkey is no longer pink.
5. Add in 1 cup of tomato sauce, 1 cup of shredded 2% cheese and the brown rice. Reduce the heat to low and mix until well blended.
6. Put 1 cup of tomato sauce into the bottom of a baking dish or foil pan. Fill each half of a pepper with meat mixture and place into the baking dish. Top with remaining sauce.
7. Either bake covered in foil for 30-40 minutes or until peppers are tender OR
8. Freeze in foil baking pan. If freezing pre-cooked, thaw overnight in the refrigerator and simply reheat. If freezing uncooked, thaw overnight and bake at 350 degrees Fahrenheit for 30-40 minutes until peppers are tender.

Postpartum diet: Easy, healthy eats

Snack ideas for the postpartum period

Whether you're breastfeeding or not, here are a few healthy snacks to help fuel your day:

- 5 whole wheat crackers with 1.5 oz cheddar cheese
- 1 Greek vanilla yogurt with 1 tbsp pecans and ½ cup blueberries
- Small apple with mini peanut butter cup
- 2 graham crackers with 1 tbsp peanut butter and 1 cup low-fat milk
- 1 cup frozen fruit blended with 1 cup yogurt
- 15 pretzel thins with 2 tbsp hummus
- Hardboiled egg slices on 1 slice whole grain bread
- ½ cup oatmeal soaked overnight with ½ cup milk and 1 cup frozen berries
- ¼ cup almonds/cashews/mixed nuts
- Multigrain granola bar with protein
- Raw veggies with 1 tbsp dip
- Nut butter oatmeal balls (see recipe below)



Nut butter oatmeal balls

Makes: 12 servings

Ingredients:

- ⅔ cup creamy nut butter
- 1 cup old fashioned oats
- ½ cup mini chocolate morsel chips
- ½ cup ground flax seed
- 2 tbsp honey

Nutritional information:

Nutrition per serving = 1 ball; calories: 172 calories; total fat: 10 grams; saturated fat: 3 grams; total carbohydrate: 15 grams; fiber: 3 grams; total protein: 6 grams; sodium: 53 mg

Preparation:

1. Mix all ingredients together.
2. Refrigerate for about 10 minutes to make it easier to roll into balls.
3. Taking a rounded spoonful, roll into 12 balls.
4. Refrigerate in storage container.

Movement: Exercise after birth

You may be eager to get back to your regular workouts to lose the baby weight, but during your postpartum period, it's important to focus on resting, healing and taking things slowly.

As you heal, you can start moving (if your healthcare provider says it's okay and you feel up to it) by:

- Taking walks around your neighborhood
- Doing breathing exercises (diaphragmic breathing)
- Stretching lightly
- Doing Kegels

Getting outside to take walks and doing other light exercises can help boost your mood and energy levels, relieve stress and help you along the healing process.

Take a deep breath, mama

Breathing exercises can help you begin to strengthen and repair your core. They're also helpful in relieving stress. Try this breathing exercise when you feel ready:

- Get comfortable and place your hands on your lower abdomen. Practice breathing slowly in until your hands move.
- Slowly exhale.
- Repeat about 5 to 8 times (and be sure to stop if it's uncomfortable).

When is it safe to exercise again?

Before you start to exercise again, it's best to talk to your healthcare provider to make sure it's safe to do so. When you can start exercising again depends largely on your birth and any symptoms you may be experiencing, and of course, if you feel ready. For some women, this may take six weeks.

Once your provider gives you the green light, remember to start slowly and watch out for red-flag signs, including:

- Abdominal pain
- Vaginal pain
- Bleeding
- Heaviness in your pelvic region

If you experience any of these signs, or if anything hurts or feels "off," stop exercising right away and call your healthcare provider.

Where to start

Once you get the okay from your healthcare provider, you can try strength exercises using light weights or your own body weight. You may also want to try yoga or a mommy-and-me class.

Early on, be extra cautious with ab exercises. If you notice any doming or bulging in the center of your abs, skip the exercise and talk to your doctor.

Be patient

Exercise is great for your health — physically and mentally. But it's also important to listen to your body and be patient. Your body has done a lot of work and it's going to take some time to heal. Focus on eating healthy, nutritious food, resting when you can and gentle movement as you ease into this new phase of life.



Your baby's first visit with the pediatrician

Before leaving the hospital, you'll meet a pediatrician who will examine your baby. This may be a pediatrician you've chosen, or if you haven't, your care team can help you choose one. Either way, choosing a pediatrician is a necessary step to making sure your little one stays healthy and is developing well.

Well visits: What to expect

In the first two years of your baby's life, your pediatrician's office will seem like a home away from home. You'll see your pediatrician 8 to 10 times over those first 24 months for well-baby visits — and more if your child comes down with a cold or other illness. Here's what to expect:

Examining your baby

Your baby will be examined a few days after birth and then at months 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 12, 18 and 24. Their weight, length and head circumference will be measured and tracked to make sure they're developing as expected.

Your pediatrician will also examine your baby from head to toe, listening to their heart and lungs, checking their eyes, ears and nose, to name a few, to make sure your baby is healthy.

Administering vaccines

Another important part of the well-baby visit is getting scheduled vaccines. While getting a shot is not particularly pleasant for your baby — or you — it's a critical and safe way to protect your baby from life-threatening diseases.

The vaccine schedule is coordinated with well-baby visits, so your little one can receive their shots when they come into the office for the exam.

Asking questions and getting reassurance

The final important part of the well-visit is asking questions — no matter how big or small. As a new parent, and even if you have other children, you'll likely have many questions about your baby's health and development. And your pediatrician is ready to answer them all and provide reassurance as your little one grows.

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