

MOTHER'S HELPER

Organizing Your Postpartum Care

The time after your birth can be one of the richest, most fulfilling times of your life if you understand what your needs will be and plan for your care. In most cultures, when a woman gives birth there is someone whose special task it is to look after the needs of the new mother and her family. Dana Rafael, author of Breast Feeding, the tender gift, or Mothering the Mother, refers to this person as the "Doula" or "do-a-lot", for a new mother needs a lot of help. We like to call this person the "Mother's Helper." This relationship lasts anywhere from a month to one year and the Mother's Helper is usually a family member. However, most of us are far from family and living in the nuclear unit. Most families rely on someone going out to work, and the first days and weeks after a birth can be trying and tender times. Your new family needs time to be together, fall in love and adjust to this new member. It is a much easier time if you are free from the work of daily living. Very few people have a friend or relative who can give as much time as is needed to care for a brand new family, nor is it especially desirable to have someone outside the basic unit there all the time when you are making your first adjustments. There are ways, however, in which a combination of friends and relatives can be orchestrated to help in a very easy and concrete manner. This can be the job of the Mother's Helper in modern society.

Attached to this sheet is a piece of paper for you to write down the names and phone numbers of all the people who have said that they would like to help after the baby is born (use every other line when you fill it out.) You don't have to know everyone really well. People often say, "If there is anything I can do, let me know," and they mean it. Include this type of person on your list, since no one is going to be asked to do anything they don't want to do. You can include people at your partner's work as well for they often want to help and even though they don't know you very well, they want to make a gesture of support to their colleague. Once you have finished, look at this list and ask yourself, "Who is the most organized person here?" That person does not need to know everybody, or even the majority of the people, they just need to be organized and wanting to help.

Next, make a list of all the things you do around the house. This probably includes vacuuming, sweeping, laundry, grocery shopping, cooking, washing dishes, gardening, etc.... List everything; then go over your list and cross out those things you think would be too hard for someone else to do, not because it's an unpleasant job, but because it would take you too long to explain it to them (for example where to put the dishes away). There should be at least five things left that you could have someone else do, and one of them should most definitely be cooking meals.

Give your two lists to your Mother's Helper and ask her to phone the people on the first list and see if there is anything they would like to do to help. The Mother's Helper then calls everyone, gives them an idea of the kind of things you would like to have done, and lets them choose the way they would most like to participate in helping you postpartum. Under each person's name the Mother's Helper writes down what they would like to do.

When you have the baby, call the Mother's Helper and tell her the birth story. She in turn can call all the people on your list, tell them the basics – letting you make individualized calls later when you have more energy – and then she can begin filling in the calendar (also attached to this page). Starting the day after your birth, or when you want, the Mother's Helper puts the name of each helper their phone number and what they will do in the square for the day that is most convenient for them to help. It is nice if the help can be spread out over about 2-6 weeks so you don't get inundated the first few days and left hanging towards the end. If you live far away it might be best to arrange for people to bring you meals at the place where your partner can easily pick them up. Work this out with the Mother's Helper beforehand. Meal providers should try to use disposable containers as much as possible, but when they can't, they should put their names on the containers and arrange for a way to pick them up later. The Mother's Helper should also remind people that new moms and babies need lots of rest and no matter how much they enjoy the visitor, 15 minutes is about as long as one should stay.

This is a wonderful opportunity for your friends to give to you – just think how much you enjoy giving someone something they really want and need – well; your friends feel the same way and are happy to help. It's a lot of work for you, more than you can imagine - just taking care of a new baby after the physical exertion of birthing. So take the time out before birth to set up your postpartum help; moms who have, really enjoy the highs of special time in a family's life. The whole family reaps the rewards.

The Tasks I Do At Home

People Who Want To Help

Name

Phone Number

Task

	Task or Meal	Name	Phone Number
Sunday			
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			

Week _____