



The
Partner's Guide
to Pregnancy,
Birth & Postpartum

Why use the *Cheat Sheets* in The Partner's Guide?

You want to support your partner during pregnancy, birth, and postpartum. But it can be difficult to know how, even if you do know what to expect. The way that pregnancy, birth, and postpartum are portrayed in the media is not realistic, and often that's our only experience with it until we go through it ourselves.

This guide will help you as you navigate pregnancy, birth, and postpartum with your partner. It will give you the confidence and knowledge to support the birthgiver in your life as they go through this major life transition. With the exception of the Cheat Sheet to Sex in Pregnancy and Postpartum, this guide is also helpful for anyone supporting a pregnant person or new parent!

You want to be the best support you can be - let me show you how.

The Cheat Sheet to Pregnancy Support

First Trimester (Week 1 to 12)

- What is changing:** Vital development of the fetus's organs. Hormone levels change significantly. The uterus begins to support the growth of the placenta and the fetus, the body adds to its blood supply to carry oxygen and nutrients to the developing baby, and your partner's heart rate increases. Risk of miscarriage is large at this time.
- Looks like:** Fatigue, nausea, headaches, constipation, mood swings, frequent urination, high blood pressure, dizziness, breast/chest tenderness, heartburn, weight gain, cramping
- Support:** Ensure your partner is eating regularly and staying hydrated. Offer emotional support and show them patience. **Don't take it personally.** Ask if they'd like you to attend doctor/midwife appointments and go if they do. Sex is usually safe, but your partner may not feel comfortable. Let them lead.

Second Trimester (Week 13 to 27)

- What is changing:** Baby's organs complete development. Baby can also start to hear and swallow. Small hairs become noticeable. Baby begins to move and develops sleeping and waking cycles. The uterus expands to make room for growing baby.
- Looks like:** Weight gain, dizziness or lightheadedness, body aches, increased appetite, stretch marks, skin changes, itching, swelling of the ankles or hands. Mood swings tend to be less pronounced and energy seems to increase compared to last trimester. Usually the most enjoyable trimester.
- Support:** Continue support from last trimester. Try to attend doctor appointments. Read and sing to baby. Sex is usually safe - continue to follow your partner's lead. Good time to educate yourself on birth and postpartum.

Third Trimester (Week 28 to 40ish)

- What is changing:** By week 37, baby's organs are fully functional and considered full term. Baby moves a lot throughout the day. Uterus stretches and body begins to prepare for birth.
- Looks like:** Increased weight gain, heartburn, swollen fingers/ankles, tender breast/chest (may also leak watery milk), hemorrhoids, difficulty sleeping, increased needs to pee. More aches, pains, and fatigue. May feel very anxious and emotional.
- Support:** Continue support from previous trimesters. Take a prenatal class together. Acknowledge the emotions that your partner is feeling. Take an active role in preparing for the postpartum time. Sex is usually safe - continue to follow your partner's lead.

The Cheat Sheet to Sex in Pregnancy & Postpartum

Pregnancy

Sex is usually safe in all three trimesters, barring a few uncommon situations. Your partner should consult their doctor or midwife if they are unsure.

Your partner may or may not feel like having sex while they're pregnant. Some pregnant folks have a much higher sex drive than before becoming pregnant and some have a lower drive. Your partner may feel very sexy in their pregnant body, or they may not. You may also experience higher or lower sex drive. All variations are normal. Follow your partner's lead. Even if sex isn't on the table, physical connection is still important. Try massage, cuddling, holding hands, or other forms of touching that you are both comfortable with.

Sex can be used to help kick-start labour at the end of pregnancy. Orgasms come with a flood of oxytocin and this can encourage labour to start if it is already imminent. If sex isn't something either of you want, you can still encourage oxytocin by cuddling and laughing.

Postpartum

After birth, your partner's body will be healing. If they birthed vaginally, they will possibly have stitches that need to heal on their perineum or in their vagina. If they birthed via cesarean, they will have just had major abdominal surgery. Regardless of which way they birthed, inside their uterus, they will have a dinner size plate wound from the placenta that needs to heal.

Sex will likely not be on their mind. The usual suggestion is to wait for the 6 week follow up appointment. Some need a lot more than 6 weeks before feeling ready for sex, and many are ready earlier. As long as your partner feels ready and their lochia (bleeding) has stopped, it is generally safe to begin to have sex again. Go slow and follow your partner's lead. They may or may not have some fears surrounding what sex will be like post-birth. Don't take it personally if they ask you to stop part way or if they just aren't ready yet. Do not pressure them into sex before they are ready.

If your partner is also nursing your baby, they may feel incredibly touched out (this happens with bottle fed babies too). Feeling touched out is normal. You can help by taking over more of the baby care and not touching their chest/breast unless they want you to. Also, folks who are nursing their babies may find that they experience a milk let-down during sex. This is also normal, but can take you by surprise!

The Cheat Sheet

to Labour Phases

Early Labour

Looks Like: Contractions may begin and/or water may break. Normal conversations, but peaks of contractions may be difficult.

Support: Help them rest/relax, distract, and prepare. Offer simple verbal encouragement.

Active Labour

Looks Like: Birthgiver appears more serious, focused, or intense. They will need more help from you.

Support: Active support. Focus on them and tell others to do the same. Reduce light and noise. Suggest position/location changes. Use comfort measures. Help establish contraction rituals. More verbal encouragement. Listen to your partner. **Don't take it personally.**

Transition

Looks Like: Birthgiver may say "I can't do this, I want to go home," etc. May cry, moan, vomit, or seem like they are mentally far away (also called "labour land").

Support: Validate feelings, encourage, and reassure them. Remind them they CAN do this. Help them see they're almost done. Continue reducing stimulation/giving privacy. Don't forget to breathe.

Pushing

Looks Like: Birthgiver will announce they feel the urge to push, or say something like "the baby is coming" or "I have to poop!"

Support: Cheer them on with positive encouragement. Support them physically. Remind them to breathe.

The Cheat Sheet to Comfort Measures

Relaxation

During or between contractions.
Aromatherapy (lotions/oils/etc)

Rhythmic Breathing

Slow and light
"Smell the flower, blow out the candle"

Pushing/Bearing Down

Avoiding bearing down
Birthgiver-led bearing down
Directed pushing

Massage/Touch

Touch, stroking, hand holding
Light pressure on the shoulders
Hand
Foot
Criss cross on back
Acupressure

Hydrotherapy

Shower (direct spray to back or belly)
Bath

Attention Focusing

Visual focus (like a picture)
Focus on music, voice, or touch
Visualization
Counting breaths
Chant, mantra, song, prayer

Hot Packs

To lower abdomen and groin
To perineum during second stage
To lower back

Cold packs

To perineum after birth
To lower back

Positions and Movements

Standing, leaning forward
Walking, slow dancing
Lunging (standing or kneeling)
Kneeling/leaning forward on ball or chair
Side-lying
Semisitting
Flat on back (with a pillow under one hip)
Squatting
Supported squat/dangle
Lap squatting

Measures for Backache

Counterpressure
Double hip squeeze
Criss-cross massage
Rolling pressure
TENS
Cold pack
Hot pack
Shower
Bath (with room to kneel and lean over side)
Open knee-chest position
Abdominal lifting
Hands-and-knees
Kneeling/leaning forward on ball or chair
Lunge (standing or kneeling)
Walking, slow-dancing

Help from YOU

Suggestions/reminders
Encouragement/reassurance
Compliments
Patience, confidence in your partner
Respond immediately to contractions
Give undivided attention
Help with positions, relaxation, rhythm
Show your love
Give lots of affection

*adapted from The Birth Partner by Penny Simkin

The Cheat Sheet to Postpartum Support

Physical

Looks like: Not only has your partner just birthed a baby, but they are healing from a dinner size plate wound in their uterus. They need rest.

Support: Bring your partner snacks and water throughout the day. Be responsible for the diaper changes or bathing of baby so your partner can rest. Take over more of the household duties (cooking, cleaning, etc). Be the voice for your partner when it comes to visitors in your home.

Emotional

Looks like: Your partner's hormones are soaring right now. It will take months for them to fully settle, especially if your partner is nursing. Baby blues for the first 2 weeks are normal and usually subside with support.

Support: Be there for your partner's big feelings. Hold space for the tears and frustration. Don't try to fix everything. Watch for signs of postpartum mood and anxiety disorders if the baby blues do not subside.

Educational

Looks like: Babies don't come with a manual. Keep yourself educated by reading recommended baby care books and blogs. If you've hired a postpartum doula, bring them your questions as well.

Support: If your partner is struggling with something, reach out to the professionals that can help. Lactation consultants or postpartum doulas are great sources of information.

YOU

Looks like: Your partner is not the only one who has become a parent. This is a big adjustment and change for you too. It's important to take care of yourself so that you can support your partner and baby.

Support: Take time out to replenish your energy. Take naps when you can and make sure that you are eating and drinking as well. Pay attention to your mood as well as you are also at risk for developing mood or anxiety disorders.

The Cheat Sheet to Infant Feeding

Feeding Human Milk Directly

Looks like: For babies who need supplementing, cup feeding or using an Supplemental Nursing System can be an option. Nursing is a skill and it takes time to learn. Feeding on demand is optimal.

Support: Cheer them on with positive encouragement. Support them physically and emotionally. Don't suggest bottles if it wasn't part of the feeding plan to begin with. Educate yourself on benefits of human milk.

Feeding Human or Formula Milk Via a Bottle

Looks like: Formula is most often fed via bottle. Human milk can be pumped, or donated milk can be used. Using paced-bottle feeding for either formula or human milk is optimal and more respectful, as well as feeding on demand. Check out YouTube for videos on what that looks like.

Support: If your partner is pumping, help them the same way as if they were feeding via their body. Some folks who bottle feed will alternate nights or take shifts in the night so that both parents get sleep.

Where to Get Help

Most doctors are not well-versed in lactation. If you are looking for infant feeding support, reach out to your local IBCLC lactation consultant, lactation educator, or La Leche League leader. They can give specialized support to help you and your partner reach your goals, whether your goals are exclusively nursing, feeding a combination of human milk and formula, or exclusively feeding formula.

Find a Lactation Consultant: clca-accl.ca

La Leche League: lllc.ca

Human Milk 4 Human Babies (peer to peer milk donation): facebook.com/hm4hb

The Cheat Sheet

to Postpartum Mood and Anxiety Disorder Symptoms

These symptoms may show up anytime from birth to even a year later. These signs and symptoms can be intense and can interfere with the ability to care for your baby, themselves, or how your partner manages simple daily tasks. Take note if you start feeling any of these as both parents can develop postpartum mood or anxiety disorders - even awesome parents.

Depressed mood or severe mood swings

Difficulty bonding with your baby

Withdrawing from family and friends

Loss of appetite or eating much more than usual

Inability to sleep or sleeping too much

Overwhelming fatigue or loss of energy

Reduced interest/pleasure in things you used to enjoy

Excessive crying

Intense irritability, anger, or rage

Fear you're not a good parent

Feelings of worthlessness, shame, guilt, or inadequacy

Diminished ability to think clearly, concentrate, or make decisions

Severe anxiety or panic attacks

Thoughts of harming yourself or your baby

Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide

The Cheat Sheet

to Postpartum Mood and Anxiety Disorders Support

How to Help

- Reassure your partner that they will get better and that they aren't alone.
- Encourage them to talk about feelings and listen without judgement.
- Help with housework and don't expect your partner to do it all.
- Encourage them to take time for themselves and to rest.
- Help them reach out to others for support.
- Schedule time together, even if it's just at home when the baby sleeps beside you.
- Offer simple affection and physical comfort, but don't push sex. Follow their lead.
- Ensure your partner eats and drinks regularly.

How to Cope When Their Anger Takes Over

- Listen for the deeper source of their frustration. Try saying "I know we can work through this. I am listening."
- Keep communication open. Verbalize your feelings instead of pulling away. Take a break if needed to regulate yourself, but make sure it is only a break.
- If you can't stay supportive due to how your partner is expressing their anger, try saying, "I want to listen to you. I know this is important, but I'm having a hard time because you're so mad at me. Can we take a break and talk about it later?"
- Ask them how you can help right now. If they don't know, make some suggestions.

Where to Get Help

- **Postpartum Support International** - postpartum.net
- **Olivia Scobie** - oliviascobie.com
- **Pacific Postpartum Support Society** - postpartum.org
- Your partner's doctor
- A local therapist in your area that is trained in perinatal support

The Cheat Sheet

to Using Your BRAIN

When an unexpected situation arises in pregnancy, labour, or postpartum, use your BRAIN. Ask yourselves (and your doctor) the following questions before making a decision. We want to know our choices before we make a decision because if we don't know our choices, we don't have any.

B What are the benefits?

R What are the risks?

A Are there any alternatives?

I What is my intuition/gut telling me?

N What if we choose to do nothing for now?

The Cheat Sheet

to Speaking From Your HEART

If after using your BRAIN, you and your partner decide that the suggestion or decision that is right is against what has been suggested for you or your partner, use your HEART. This HEART script will help you respond with kindness and honesty. PS: Use this script with your friends and family who keep making well meaning suggestions too!

- H** **Hear:** "We hear what you're saying and we understand why you recommended this..."
- E** **Empathize:** "...and we know you want the best for us and my baby..."
- A** **Affirm/Assert:** "...but we intend to wait a bit longer before considering x, y, or z." OR "...we would rather try this alternative instead."
- R** **Reassure:** "I will let you know if anything changes."
- T** **Thanks:** "Thank you so much for your time and for taking good care of us." OR "Thank you so much for loving and caring about us."

The Cheat Sheet

on What to Read
(Books and Websites)

- **The Birth Partner by Penny Simkin**
- **The Mama Natural Week-by-Week Guide to Pregnancy and Childbirth by Genevieve Howland**
- **Pregnancy, Childbirth, and the Newborn by Penny Simkin, Janet Whalley, and Ann Keppler**
- **The Father's Home Birth Handbook by Leah Hazard**
- **Sweet Sleep by La Leche League**
- **The First Forty Days by Heng Ou**
- **When Baby Brings the Blues: Solutions for Postpartum Depression by Dr Ariel Dalfen, M.D.**
- **The Birth Deck by Glow** - this will give you clear directions and illustrations for supporting your partner in birth
- **www.mamanatural.com/delivery-videos/** - watch birth videos to help you prepare
- **askdrsears.com** - find all the answers to pregnancy, birth, and babies here

*Please note that many of these books and resources are gendered and focus on the heteronormative experience.



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