

Postnatal Depletion — It's Not Just Tired

A real condition that can persist for years. And almost no one is talking about it.

"Postnatal depletion is incredibly common — but that doesn't mean it's optimal.

Chronic exhaustion, mood instability, and nutrient deficiencies can persist for years if we don't actively replenish mothers."

— Dr. Hillary Claire, Clinical Psychologist & Nutrition Specialist

What Is Postnatal Depletion?

Pregnancy and birth deplete your body of critical nutrients — iron, magnesium, zinc, B vitamins, omega-3s, and more. If you're breastfeeding, your body continues transferring nutrients daily.

Symptoms That Are Often Dismissed as "Just Motherhood"

- ◆ Relentless exhaustion that sleep doesn't fix
- ◆ Brain fog and poor concentration
- ◆ Mood swings or emotional fragility
- ◆ Hair shedding beyond normal postpartum
- ◆ Feeling "off" in ways hard to explain
- ◆ Anxiety that feels physical
- ◆ Increased irritability

What's actually happening:

| | |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Low iron | → feels like depression |
| Low magnesium | → feels like anxiety |
| Low B vitamins | → brain fog, fatigue |
| Low omega-3s | → mood instability |
| Blood sugar swings | → mood swings |

Mental health and nutrition are not separate conversations.

When we don't test, we guess. And guessing leaves mothers under-supported.

What to ask your provider:

- ◆ "Can we run a full panel including iron, ferritin, B12, vitamin D, and magnesium?"
- ◆ "Could nutrient deficiency be contributing to how I'm feeling?"
- ◆ "I'm still breastfeeding — what should I be supplementing?"

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Signs You May Be Depleted — Not Just Tired

Postnatal depletion can persist for years if we don't actively replenish mothers. — Dr. Hillary Claire

Physical Signs

- Relentless exhaustion
- Hair shedding significantly
- Muscle cramps or weakness
- Dizziness or light-headedness
- Persistent headaches
- Low milk supply
- Feeling cold all the time
- Slow wound healing
- Frequent illness or low immunity
- Poor sleep even when possible
- Skin, nail, or hair changes

Mental + Emotional Signs

- Brain fog and forgetfulness
- Mood swings or irritability
- Anxiety that won't settle
- Feeling "off" but can't explain it
- Crying more than feels normal
- Difficulty concentrating
- Low motivation or joy
- Feeling numb or disconnected
- Blood sugar crashes
- Loss of appetite or constant hunger
- Overwhelmed by small decisions

If you checked several of these, this is not "just being a new mom."

Ask your provider to test iron, B12, vitamin D, magnesium, and thyroid.

Standard labs often miss depletion. You deserve individualized care, not dismissal.

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Fueling The Mother

Your body just did something extraordinary. Feed it like it did.

Protein

Why it matters:

Repairs tissue, stabilizes blood sugar, supports milk production

Eggs, meat, fish, beans

Healthy Fats

Why it matters:

Supports hormones, brain function, mood and satiety

Avocado, nuts, olive oil

Complex Carbs

Why it matters:

Energy for recovery and milk production, steadies mood

Oats, sweet potato, rice

Color + Water

Why it matters:

Vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, hydration supports every system

Greens, berries, water

Key Minerals Often Depleted After Birth

Iron Low iron can feel like depression and exhaustion

Magnesium Low magnesium can feel like anxiety

B Vitamins Low B12 can feel like brain fog and fatigue

Vitamin D Low Vit D linked to low mood and immunity

Ask your provider to test — standard labs often miss depletion.

Simple Rules

- ◆ Eat within 1 hour of waking
- ◆ Pair carbs with protein + fat
- ◆ Don't go 3–4 hrs without food
- ◆ Add electrolytes if breastfeeding
- ◆ +300–500 cal/day if nursing

Blood sugar swings are mood swings.

When meals are skipped or chaotic, cortisol rises, anxiety spikes, and the nervous system never fully settles.

This is not a character flaw. It is a body under strain. — Dr. Hillary Claire

Signs you may be running on empty:

Hair shedding • Brain fog • Mood swings • Dizziness • Constant hunger • Anxiety that won't settle

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You are not meant to live on scraps. You deserve a full plate.

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How To Actually Feed Yourself With a Newborn

Not aspirational. Actually doable at 3am with one hand.

You aren't forgetting to eat because you're disorganized. You're skipping meals because everyone else's needs are louder. Here's how to change that without adding to your load.

Set Up Your Environment So Eating Happens Automatically

The feeding station rule

Wherever you nurse or bottle feed — put snacks there. A basket, a tray, a drawer. Nuts, bars, crackers, dates. Baby eats. You eat. Same time.

If baby feeds 8x a day, you eat 8 times. Problem solved.

The big batch rule

When you do cook — make triple. Freeze portions in labelled bags. A good batch cook day covers a week of lunches. Hard boil a dozen eggs. Portion trail mix.

One hour of prep = one week of not starving.

Ask Your Village To Help With Food Specifically

What to put on your meal train or ask friends directly:

- ◆ "Drop food at the door — no knock, no visit needed"
- ◆ "Send a grocery delivery gift card — more useful than flowers"
- ◆ "Make something that freezes well and portions easily"

When Nothing Is Working — Permission Granted

- ◆ Protein shake in a bottle — drink it one-handed while feeding
- ◆ Takeout is a valid meal. So is cereal. So is a handful of almonds and a banana.
- ◆ Something is always better than nothing. The goal is intake, not perfection.

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What To Eat — First Week Postpartum

Not a meal plan. A survival guide. Nourishment over perfection.

The goal this week: eat within an hour of waking, pair carbs with protein and fat, and never go more than 3–4 hours without food. That's it. That's the whole plan.

Breakfast

- ◆ Eggs any style + toast
- ◆ Greek yogurt + granola + fruit
- ◆ Smoothie with protein powder + banana + nut butter
- ◆ Oatmeal + seeds + berries
- ◆ Avocado toast + egg
- ◆ Cottage cheese + fruit

Eat within 1 hour of waking.

Lunch

- ◆ Rotisserie chicken + rice
- ◆ Soup — bone broth base
- ◆ Deli wrap + cheese + veg
- ◆ Lentil or bean soup
- ◆ Leftover dinner — always make extra at night
- ◆ Hummus + pita + veg plate

One-handed meals are a valid strategy.

Dinner

- ◆ Sheet pan protein + veg
- ◆ Slow cooker anything
- ◆ Pasta + meat sauce
- ◆ Stir fry + rice
- ◆ Takeout — zero guilt
- ◆ Frozen meal + side salad
- ◆ Casserole from your village

Always make double. Tomorrow's lunch = done.

Keep These Visible and Within Reach at All Times

- ◆ Nuts and nut butter packets
- ◆ Dates stuffed with nut butter
- ◆ String cheese and crackers
- ◆ Protein bars — not all are equal
- ◆ Hard boiled eggs (prep in batch)
- ◆ Full fat yogurt pouches

A snack within reach during night feeds = non-negotiable.

Feeding yourself is not indulgent. It is strategic.

It steadies your nervous system. It supports your hormones. It fuels recovery.

Postpartum Nutrition — Resources

Experts, tools, and research we trust. All in one place.

You are not meant to live on scraps.
Fueling the mother fuels the entire home. Start there.

Experts Featured in We Got You, Mama

Dr. Hillary Claire

*Clinical Psychologist
Nutrition & Environmental Medicine*

Postnatal depletion and
blood sugar regulation

Alana Boneman

*Naturopath &
Holistic Nutritionist*

Postpartum nourishment
and body image recovery

Kim Perez

*Functional Nutritional
Therapy Practitioner*

Postnatal mineral
depletion and lab testing

Helpful Tools & Organizations

Academy of Nutrition

Postpartum nutrition guidance

eatright.org

Office on Women's Health

Breastfeeding nutrition resources

womenshealth.gov

Evidence Based Birth

Research on maternal nutrition

evidencebasedbirth.com

Research Worth Reading

Iranian Journal of Nursing & Midwifery Research (2024)

"The association between postpartum depression and nutrition and dietary patterns — systematic review"

24-study review finding low vitamin D, iron, folate, and poor diet quality are risk factors for PPD.

[pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11296595](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11296595)

Santos et al. — European Psychiatry (2025)

"Omega-3 and postpartum depression: assessing the effectiveness of omega-3 PUFAs in preventing PPD"

Comprehensive review showing women are significantly depleted in omega-3s during pregnancy and lactation — and that populations with higher fish consumption show lower rates of PPD.

MDPI Antioxidants Review (2026)

"Dietary supplements in pregnancy and postpartum — evidence, safety, and precision nutrition framework"

2020–2025 guidelines summary showing iron, folic acid, vitamin D, and omega-3 supplementation reduce key maternal health risks. Based on WHO 2024, ACOG 2024, NICE 2023 recommendations.

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