

(introductory music)

DISCLAIMER: Taking Back Birth is a production of the Indie Birth Association and indiebirth.com. No material on this podcast should be considered medical advice. Birth is not a medical event.

MARYN: Welcome to Indie Birth's series of podcasts, Taking Back Birth. Today I am so excited to share with you a subject that is very near and dear to my heart. I am about 35 weeks pregnant right now so birth is coming closer, and I focused on birth and pregnancy mostly for the last—I don't know—18 or so podcasts. And today I am looking beyond as much as possible to the postpartum time, to the time after baby, to the time that nobody really talks about a whole lot, and to a time that is definitely neglected in our culture, and for sure in our country and in just the way we live.

So having had six babies previously, I obviously recognize how important this time is to me, and I have seen it as well when walking with other women. That for my first couple births, it was all about the pregnancy, it was all about the birth, and didn't give any thought or planning to what would happen after the baby was here. Well, that meant rough postpartum periods for me at least for a couple of my babies. Breastfeeding, not having support, not understanding the meaning of rest and wellness in the postpartum time, being up too soon, doing too much, taking care of other children, just not having an understanding or appreciation for this time.

So although I still have hopefully at least a month plus before I'm at that point, my wheels have been turning, and I feel like that's where a lot of my energy is going into planning and bringing my own awareness back to how special this time is. If you've never had a baby before, then that's great. You're in a perfect place to not take this time for granted and to learn before you're there that regardless of what the birth looks like for you that you will have a baby that needs care and love at the end but so will you. And that is something we just—again we just don't talk about.

So even in the pregnancy time, think about how many people you know have baby showers. That's a great example of already not respecting this time that is to come, and there's nothing wrong with people being excited about a baby coming. I mean that is sort of what this is all about, but it's also about watching a woman become a mother. And although we can be excited about the baby and we most definitely will be and the family definitely will and there's gifts and all kinds of things, that there is an awareness we can plant ourselves as the pregnant person in our last part of pregnancy for our family and friends.

So not to say that their gifts aren't welcome, but to bring their awareness to this sacred time. The postpartum is also known as the fourth trimester in some places, and although that's kind of a medicalized term thinking of pregnancy in trimesters, I'm guilty of it for sure. And the reason I like the fourth trimester is it's just a way of illustrating to people that there is another section of this childbearing year. There is this part that's necessary and goes along with these three trimesters of pregnancy.

So even though our bodies might be healed and ready to go as little as six weeks after a birth, our brains and our emotions may not be for a very long time, and I think again this is the fourth trimester. This is the three months that we have, that we give ourselves as women and as mothers, to digest what has just occurred in our lives whether it's our first baby or our tenth baby. Doesn't matter. Each time we are reborn ourselves as mothers, and we have a different soul to meet and care for. So it's never the same twice. So each time we give ourselves the three months to regenerate and to bond and to take care of ourselves.

So talking about the fourth trimester with your family, with your partner, with your friends is really valuable because again it's not something we hear about. Most families have a partner at least that is going to go off to work really soon after the birth. And likewise friends and family are usually really eager to help within days of the birth, but then they don't as much. And that's for a lot of reasons, but I think it's mostly because people don't understand what new mothers need.

So this podcast I'm hoping will help you understand what it is that you need because we're all different but with a respect for this time and then you'll be able to pass on this information and your own passion about this time. What part is important to you? Does it mean more to you that you get meal help or what is going to be important to you to create for this postpartum time? What is your postpartum dream? I think that's something really good to think about. It can be whatever you make it. Certainly bonding with the baby is huge, and that is something we only get a certain amount of time to do. And that is something I have realized in my many pregnancies and births that never loses its sacredness. It never becomes less special that I only get this immediate time with this newborn where it's just she and I, or he and I, and it's a bonding that needs to take place, and really needs space to take place.

So we're going to get into some of that today. That's where my brain is, thinking about the postpartum, thinking about how to honor the last part of my pregnancy so again back to that idea of baby showers. Nothing wrong with a baby shower, but again after

this perhaps you'll feel more inclined to in addition plan yourself a blessing, a mother blessing or wait until after the baby is here and have some kind of ceremony or blessing. It doesn't have to be fancy or complicated. When I've had some in the past, it's just been a few special friends coming together, even just for a short amount of time to kind of put their blessing on the birth. So if you look up blessingway for example, Google it, that's one name. I just call them mama blessings, but blessingway is the—I believe the traditional Native American term, and there's all kinds of ceremony that can go along with that. But it can be really simple, be as simple as lighting a candle with your friends. Everybody saying a few words or maybe writing something in a journal, or just coming together to give the mom-to-be a foot massage or do henna on her belly and have some good food. So it certainly doesn't have to be fancy, but again the focus is on the woman, on the birth, on the baby as a whole.

So we don't separate momma baby in this world of holistic care. Momma baby is one and will remain one for a good, long time after the baby is born even. So I think right there is a great motivation for communicating that to people and possibly not going the route of just a baby shower because that is putting the focus on the baby and although that's beneficial we want to honor the whole unit.

So some of my favorite books for the postpartum time can be found on the Indie Birth list of resources, and you could buy right from Amazon right from the link. One of my favorite books is *After the Baby's Birth* by midwife Robin Lim, who is amazing. And the book really is amazing. I don't think I've gotten sick of it after all these years, and I find something each postpartum time that is new to me in it. So I know the book pretty well, but I read it in the postpartum time, and I just am amazed at some of the simple suggestions she has. It's all about nourishment.

So really our pregnancies should be all about nourishment, but the postpartum time is definitely all about nourishment on every level, just like pregnancy, physical, emotional, spiritual. And one of the most interesting things I learned from this book and in my own research sort of when presenting this subject was the way the postpartum time is treated in other cultures and other countries. This is not something I knew way back when with my first and second babies, and I wish I had because it's really clear when you know this stuff to see that our culture here in the U.S. is a bit messed up when it comes to birth and mothering. How many people do you know that are out and about with a brand new baby at two days of age, right? Walking at Wal-Mart or just out in public? Yeah, that's really, really scary actually for a variety of reasons.

But it mainly comes back to the lack of knowledge and the lack of respect that we have for a mother and her child after birth. It's a sacred time in many cultures. So I'm going to just read a couple of examples from this book just because I think it's so interesting. So some postpartum practices around the world. So in India "Ayurvedic tradition encourages a new mother to stay at home and be pampered for the first 22 days postpartum. Her role as an exalted one is honored. This time of rest helps strengthen the infant mother bond. Breastfeeding becomes smooth. Few visitors are allowed, and the obvious it decreases the possibility of exposure to disease." And also in the Ayurvedic tradition should be interested, and this book centers around that tradition although you don't have to be a follower of that tradition—I'm not—there are specifically prepared foods that the mother eats after birth according to that tradition. So that's just one example.

So immediately after the birth of a child in Bali, there is a ritual for the placenta. The placenta plays a very major part—this is me talking not the book—the placenta plays a very major part in a sacred postpartum experience I believe just because it is a sacred organ and has played such an integral part in the life of this child. So in Bali back to the book, there's a ritual for the placenta called the ari-ari. It means little brother or sister. So the men wash and bury the placenta with offerings, give it thanks for the support of new life. And then there's a kind of ceremony with burning leaves and bamboo. And basically elders will go visit the mother and for the first 105 days of life the child will never touch the ground. "She is held in arms continuously floating like an angel from loving person to another, and when she touches Mother Earth for the first time, she is officially welcomed to the human family."

So cultures all over the world honor the mother as an exalted one. Those are Robin Lim's words. Aren't those amazing words? Exalted one. Well, of course. Birthing a baby is amazing. And it's an honoring of course this new soul.

So in Indonesia, most women do not go out of the family compound until the baby is 42 days old, and then on the 42nd day, the baby is named and a feast is held. Here's a very interesting one. "The majority of births in Holland take place at home," probably knew that, "and they get in-home postpartum care by professional maternity nurses." So they literally have somebody come from 8:00-5:00 every day for eight days, and they do everything and anything that is needed around the house as well as postpartum checkups.

So that could be its own class, never mind podcast, is how do we provide this for ourselves and for other women in our community? How do we get back to these really

important roots because I do believe they're roots. I think ages and ages ago when women birthed together, when there wasn't a medicalized system of birth, that this was common practice. If you lived in a village or if you lived in a compound, you were naturally going to support a woman that had just birthed, and you were going to bring her food and keep her safe and warm and not allow disease to be near her or the baby. So I do believe that this is something we need to find again. It is not normal, it is not—I mean it might be normal. It's not a good sort of normal that we're at a place where women birth outside of their homes, come home, and just resume normal life, going here and there, meeting people, on so many levels. So just a brief, brief reminder there that cultures all over the world respect the postpartum time more than we do, and they have respect for the process the mother and baby have just been through. It's a huge process again on every level, not just a physical level, that there is an immense gratitude and appreciation and awe around this new mother and her baby.

So what can we do in our own lives to get some of that? Because really what are the advantages? Think about it. Maybe you've had a baby before and not even had these ideas in your head so if that's been the case, you'll certainly have something to compare to. But the advantages I think are pretty obvious. Well, like Robin Lim said, first of all we're keeping disease and germs away from the mama and baby. So if you structure your postpartum time so that for the first—let's say five days—there are no visitors other than people to possibly drop off food or take care of stuff around the house, but not to visit with you. So your first couple days are spent naked in bed with a naked baby. How does this change things? It certainly cuts down on the germs and things that will come into your space. It provides skin-to-skin contact with this baby which enables your milk to come in stronger and easier, better breastfeeding, easier breastfeeding which in turn means less bleeding for you. The uterus is going to be contracting really well.

So there's a million reasons why the first couple days at least should be spent virtually in isolation. Now again what that means for you I don't know. Maybe that means two days, maybe that means seven days. For me, it means at least three or four. So we're all different, and sometimes when I give this talk I think there's the potential for people getting sort of offended in their own way, and that's okay, saying things like, "Well, we don't live in India in a village, and we don't have that luxury. My husband has to get back to work, and I have to take care of ten kids."

Yes, yes, yes. Those things are all true, and the reality is sometimes our lives call, but I do believe if we have this information beforehand, we can provide a certain amount of buffer for ourselves to have this sacred time even if it's 24 hours. Because 24 hours is better than none, and just to have that awareness and to plan with that awareness I

think would be helpful. But can we all stay in bed or in the house for 42 days? I know people that have done it right here in my very town, and it worked great for them. But is it something we all can do? No, it's not, and I know for myself that's not something I would be able to do both because I have kids to take care of and also because I would go crazy. I would probably go stir crazy.

But one of the old wives' tales I guess you could say about the postpartum time—and I don't know where this came from so sorry can't give anybody credit. It's an old wives' tale, but five days in the bed, five days on the bed, five days around the bed. So I think that's pretty clear. Five days in the bed means naked with baby. Five days on the bed means probably dressed, maybe you're reading and doing other things but still kind of in isolation. Not bad isolation just people bringing you meals and whatever. And then the last part of that two weeks is still in your room or perhaps in your house, but the reason for five days—what is it—in the bed, on the bed, around the bed—the around the bed part—would be if you have any other kids, you know how easy it is to get up and go into the main part of the house and suddenly be on duty, suddenly be pouring juice or serving food or whatever it is. So that's the reason I think for the last five days still being in the bedroom to kind of protect yourself from the real world because the entry from pregnancy to birth back into what we consider day-to-day life can be really shocking and really profound. Again I don't think it matters how many babies you've had. It can be really interesting and not in a bad way. It can be in a great way.

But there's so many changes that go on in the postpartum time that to give yourself at least a couple days to really just immerse yourself in what just happened. It's a funny time. Your hormones are shifting rapidly to not being pregnant anymore. It happens really fast. For all the nine, ten months you spend pregnant within a matter of hours, you're not pregnant anymore. However, the hormone shift is such that there's milk hormones being made, milk being made. So you're not exactly not pregnant anymore either. I mean you are. You're not pregnant, but you're not back to yourself that you were a year ago. You're somewhere else. You're kind of in this fuzzy, hazy time of still feeling pregnant in some ways and bleeding and making milk and breastfeeding this new baby. So it's a very, very interesting time, and giving yourself that time to process and, heck, just sleep. Sleep with the baby and nurse the baby and just getting up to use the bathroom that first 24 hours is a real gift. It's a real gift to yourself and the baby. So check Robin Lim's book out if you're interested in more postpartum practices and also some really good ideas about how to nurture yourself during the postpartum time. She has some exercises in there.

One of my favorites of hers that I think I have done every time since I found her book is a postpartum castor oil belly pack. So after you've birthed a baby, your body feels really weird I think at least for the first few days, kind of empty and squishy. And the organs are trying to figure out how to get back to where they need to go. The uterus is contracting, and all the while, you're kind of sitting or being sedentary which is a good thing, but things can feel strange for a while.

So this postpartum belly pack is really wonderful. It's just a heating pad and castor oil. And basically just taking the time to lay there for ten minutes with your baby on you or next to you while your belly gets some love. And you can also do this with moxa. I love moxa, and that's a Chinese herb, like a thing you light basically. You can get from acupuncturists or maybe order online, but it has the same effect. It's just a warmth, and I know I'm not an expert by any stretch about the postpartum practices around the world, but I know warmth is a big thing especially in the Ayurvedic tradition.

There's beliefs in some cultures that because the mother was open to birth the baby that cool air could get in and that the whole idea is keeping her warm. So whether or not you believe that sort of doesn't matter. I think warmth just feels good and especially over the belly and the uterus and again it's just taking the time to care for yourself and to thank your body and to realize what an amazing job it's done and not just take it for granted. So that's something else in her book I like, and there's a million other suggestions.

And personal care she's got a lot of those, and again that's all personal, but honoring your body no matter what your religious beliefs are on a physical level, your body just did something really amazing and on every level it really has. So taking the time to honor it and be gentle with it and feed yourself really good, warm food. Many women are anxious to get back to their own bodies without a baby in it. I totally understand that. But I have learned appreciation for at least the first few days and weeks as far as nutrition go, that you're not skimping, that you may not feel you need to eat as much as you did when you were pregnant, but perhaps you do especially calorie wise and hydration as well is really important so that you always have tea or water or something near your bedside as your nursing and producing milk. So those are the bare bones there, basics of physical care, and there's a million more we could go into, but just thinking along the lines again of honoring your body and taking care of it really well because although it did an amazing job the last nine or ten months, it has a very amazing job to continue to do which is to nourish this baby and to nourish you so that two, three months out you feel good. When you're ready to get back in the world at three months postpartum, that you feel ready. You feel strong, and you may not feel

back to yourself, and that's okay, but you don't feel exhausted and run down already. It's a very easy thing to do in the postpartum—exhaust yourself I mean especially if you have other kids. And it's easy to get to the three month mark and just be really depleted.

So the whole theme here right after the baby is to nourish so that there is no depletion and you can go on in your life feeling better perhaps than you did before. So let's talk about some specifics. What else could we do in the postpartum time to nourish ourselves? Certainly we can look to the outside for help as well, and I think that's a great time to do that if that feels right to you whether that's massage or chiropractic or acupuncture. That there are so many benefits that these modalities have for us in the postpartum time, just depending on what we need and what our beliefs are. I know acupuncture has worked really well for me and worked meaning just bringing myself into alignment in an easier way.

The placenta plays a huge part in a sacred postpartum I believe or at least a nourishing, healthy postpartum. The placenta is an amazing organ and has fed your baby for all this time. Not only does it deserve to be honored, but most mammals will take back their placenta after birth meaning ingest it. So that's becoming pretty common place now. It used to be one of those crazy things that people thought only crazy people did, but I think more and more women now are realizing the benefits of that and we have a great article that Margo wrote for Indie Birth, a blog post.

So you could Google DIY placenta for Indie Birth. Indie Birth DIY placenta, and she has a great article on how to prepare your own placenta raw which is what we collectively think is the most beneficial. There are lots of ways—encapsulation—but this is the do it yourself way, not having to pay anybody a large sum of money or any money at all to do what's natural which is to consume your placenta if that feels right to you after birth. And it's one of these things that's becoming an industry as well. I'm not going to spend a lot of time talking about that. All I can say is I have done it raw, and I have felt the benefits of that, and that is what I would recommend for those of you that want to replenish in that way and think it will help you. And again the article is really helpful on just giving you a simple way on how to do that without involving anybody else.

Let's see what else. I think taking care of our immune systems can be really helpful postpartum. I personally just do. I like to at least feel like I'm contributing, keeping myself healthy and the baby healthy especially here when this baby will be born in the winter. So for me, that means probably some herbs and other herbs I'd get from

acupuncturist and just probiotics, and again, just a good diet—lots of fluid, lots of rest, just finding ways to build myself up so that in a couple months I'm feeling really good. One other important subject I think is how do you take care of your family? That could mean one person, that could mean a bunch of kids. I don't know what that means for you, but most of us have other people to think about. And that's sort of the problem with the postpartum time is so many women think, "I can't do that. I don't have the space or time to spend that much time doing nothing." Of course, it's not doing nothing. It's taking care of yourself, but so often, taking care of ourselves goes to the back burner. And I know I've felt this way. When I'm not pregnant, I feel suddenly like I don't necessarily deserve the same kind of attention in a certain kind of way.

People are all about pregnant women and, "Oh, here's a seat on the bus, and oh, don't lift that, and oh, do you need help with that?" The minute you're not pregnant there's not that desire on hardly anybody's part to really help out. So we sometimes get this feeling that we're not worthy of that, and that when the baby is here, we should suddenly snap back to our roles of taking care of others.

Again while that may be true especially in some cases, it may have to happen sooner than later, we need to teach those around us, those that love us, that we need to nourish ourselves, and that we can together come up with a plan for the family feeling nourished as well without the mom or the woman being in charge of the household at a time when she can't and she shouldn't. So what can we do to support our families? I think the biggest thing we can do is to ask for community support, and it's not something I think everybody has. But we can ask so whether it's a couple family members or a couple friends or maybe in your community you're lucky enough to have a bunch of women that honor the postpartum time and have collectively sort of come together and made a group. And this group helps out the moms that are birthing. I know we have a sort of thing here and used to for sure.

So if a bunch of women are sort of at the same time in their lives having babies, then you all help each other. But again it's in communicating this information so that women know they're not alone, and they know that part of planning for birth is in planning for the postpartum. So I think that's obvious. If you have a group of people you can rely on and you don't always have to know them super well. Sometimes you'll be surprised at who will step forward when you ask your community for help. So I mean I think it was last week that I posted on Facebook for my community, "Hey, who wants to sort of be notified when the baby is here, and who can lend us some help?" And I was just very honest in asking for it because we don't have family that is going to come and help us this time. We have in the past. We don't this time. So I want to find out who's really

willing and when more people help, the obvious thing is nobody is taking on that much, right? So it could mean a meal, that a person makes one meal, and wouldn't you do that for somebody if they asked when they had a baby. Of course you would.

So it's just paying it forward for many people. They will happily bring you a meal, and before you know it, you have a week or two weeks or if you're really lucky three or four weeks of people bringing you meals. And you can have a friend organize this. It's not something that when you've just had a baby you want to necessarily be in charge of. So you could have a friend with a group or an email list or a Facebook group or whatever and she can be in charge of organizing who brings what when.

There's also quite a few online websites. I think Meal Train is one of them. There's a bunch now where somebody just sets up the meal train so to speak, and people just sign up. So this a great way of planning ahead for your family and for yourself to be nourished without stressing over it. And if you're going to have a baby shower or a mama blessing, then the people that come to that are great to ask. I went to a mama blessing a couple years ago, and at the blessing there were a bunch of index cards. And there was a list pretty much up on the wall that said what this family was going to need from cleaning the house to walking the dog to taking the other child to the park or whatever it was. And the index cards were there so that you could put your name and your phone number and what you'd be willing to do.

So after their blessing, they had a nice stack of people really willing to help that they could call on. I mean there is nothing like getting meals or help in the postpartum. It beats anything I think—any baby gift, anything at all. So if you don't have family around, a postpartum doula can be really helpful and fill many of those roles. And if you have family wanting to give you gifts and you really don't know what to ask for because truly I don't think a baby needs too much more than some cloth diapers and a sling—if you have people willing, then have them donate money to a postpartum doula and hire yourself somebody for a week or two that just comes an hour or two a day even to clean up the kitchen and to run the vacuum and to throw some laundry in. These are the things that we all do—most of us—on a daily bases, and we are going to need someone to take over. So think about that a little bit. Just think about how you can plan for yourself and your family so that everybody is feeling nourished and happy as you adjust to this new soul in your life which is so exciting obviously. If every family could have the time and space to integrate and appreciate these moments, I think things would be very, very different in our world.

So those are some of my thoughts today on nourishing the postpartum period. I hope that you are able to start planning for yours at least little by little. Come up with the things that are important for you and why they're important and communicate them to those that you love and those that love you so that you're on the same page. And you can truly, truly enjoy and relish and just be in love with this new baby without having to think about too much responsibility. That is the goal. The sacred postpartum.

So for that and more please visit us at indiebirth.com. We've got online classes for birth and regularly—usually pretty regular—webinar classes on different subjects that we come up with as well as free consultations. So thanks so much for listening. Have a great day.

(closing music)