

(introductory music)

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MARYN: Welcome to Indie Birth's *Taking Back Birth* series of podcasts here on iTunes. Well, I have made my way through a pregnancy in the last couple of months and am thrilled to report the birth of our new daughter, Ever Wild who is nursing right here with me. I'm sure you'll hear her. All cuddled up as we lay here in bed on day four postpartum. So it's been four days since her amazing birth, and that's a story that I'll share separately. Maybe in written form. Or I don't know. Perhaps a podcast of her birth story. But for now, I wanted to just enjoy this time. This time with her so new. And a little bit of quiet in my house at least for the moment despite her nursing sounds.

And I don't have a real agenda for this podcast other than just kind of going through my thoughts and feelings about early postpartum into, let's say, day three or four, which is where I am now. And, again, partly for me to document this time. It's pretty cool to be able to go back and listen. But also for you, hopefully, it's helpful just to hear somebody in the space that you may be in or about to be in and just what I'm thinking about and how things have gone so far.

So, again, I don't really have an outline, per se. Not that these podcasts are usually really technical. But I definitely don't today. Like I said, I'm literally lying here in my bed nursing my baby while the other kids are out. And it's a crazy time, I think, the early postpartum. Crazy in a good way. But I've had—this is my seventh postpartum experience. And they've all been different but similar. And I think the way they've been similar is just this feeling of still other worldliness. I talked a lot about that at the end of the pregnancy and going into the labor of not feeling like you belong in either world. Sort of the real world or the birth world. Kind of in between those things before labor. And then here you are on the other side having passed through the veil, having passed through this initiation. Whatever that may have looked like for you.

But still just this feeling of not belonging yet to the world in a different way. Certainly not ready to engage the real world other than sitting here doing this. Very few visitors. We've had very nice friends come and just help out around the house, do housework, take the kids out. But not make a point of wanting to meet Ever or talk with me knowing that this time is sacred. So I've been enjoying being secluded, which, having six kids, is pretty hard, but something that I really strive for postpartum. And if you listen to a previous podcast on planning for the postpartum, you can learn more about traditions in other cultures and how we really are one of the only cultures that don't acknowledge this

sacred time for mom and baby. The time of bonding, of me getting to know her, of her getting to know me, of establishing nursing, of allowing my body to recover and heal.

So those are the things I'm going for when I'm laying here secluded from my family. I want this time alone with Miss Ever. She's so new and sweet, and I'm getting to know her and just cuddle with her and spend time with her. And also taking the time that's necessary for my body to heal. And pretty gentle, normal birth at home was what we had. So nothing huge there. But the body, I think, works hard through the process of labor, and it's just a matter of resting and allowing the bleeding to do what it needs to. Kind of ebb and flow. And, again, the milk coming in which is another new thing for the body and definitely different than pregnancy. So all kinds of adjustments on our body's part need to happen even if we've done this many times before.

So I feel more respectful of that adjustment than I did probably four or five babies ago where I was up and at them and out to lunch and all kinds of crazy stuff a couple days postpartum. The immediate postpartum, to me, are the moments after birth. And those were truly special as they usually are. And I'm only couple days out from having experienced that. But it almost feels so far away already lying here with this newborn and, again, nursing her and establishing my center again. It almost feels like longer than four days which is kind of sad, I think, almost. But the immediate postpartum was wonderful. We had our free birth here. So nobody to tell me what to do or nobody that I didn't want to be a part of this experience when she was born.

She was in my arms and never left them and hasn't left them and has only been touched by her brothers and sisters and her dad. And hasn't left the house, obviously. So she was born downstairs in our house where we have a couple bedrooms. She was born in my daughter's bedroom. And immediately after, I felt pretty good. It was a long labor, but her birth was quick. And so I was helped upstairs to my bedroom where I got a shower and just cuddle with her. We did weigh her which was fun. I don't think that's something that people have to do whether or not they have a midwife or not. Just kind of depends if you want to know. But I enjoy weighing my babies and seeing what they are. And my kids like help with that. So the kids helped with that.

And we tied her cord off with some really cute pink string that we had. And that way we didn't have to use a big clamp. Those can get irritating for babies. And we didn't cut the placenta from her belly—from her cord—for quite a few hours after birth. So she was born, and we were helped upstairs with the placenta attached to her still. Wrapped up. And a couple hours went by before we really got around to doing that and weighing her. So it's been a very slow process, but that's something I love about being in charge of my births. And I guess you could say possibly free birth or unassisted birth, in general, is that you do have more of an opportunity to do things at your own pace. You're not on someone else's schedule to get home or whatever their list of things to do is. And I

know, as a midwife, there certainly is a list of things that I too would look to do before I left someone's house.

But when I'm on my own here, doing my own birth, then I don't have to do any of that if I don't want to. So we did it all at our own pace. She was born at about 9:30 at night. So by the time we were kind of done with all that and had eaten and just kind of felt settled, it was close to midnight before we all got to sleep. So the immediate postpartum can be pretty simple. I think on mom and baby's part when both are healthy that there's not too much to do. It's just being with your baby in bed, allowing the baby to nuzzle the breast and nurse if she wants to, and most do pretty soon after a normal, gentle birth. And Ever did quite—right away actually. Was latched on and nursing.

So that leads to contractions. Again, if you haven't had a baby yet, that's a fun fact is that your uterus will continue to contract after the baby is out. And this is all perfect and wonderful really because the uterus needs to get smaller and shrink down. And when that happens, you do bleed. So that's definitely something that is unique to the first 12 hours, I think, is pretty heavy period type bleeding. Again, for the first 12 hours, and then it diminishes quite rapidly. So that's part of the early postpartum or the immediate postpartum for all of us. And it's just monitoring that bleeding and taking stock of how you feel and that your uterus is firm and contracting. And you'll feel that. You can't miss a contraction really especially when the baby is nursing.

And just getting up a whole lot that first night, at least I do. You've expanded your blood volume during pregnancy a la Brewer diet or whatever. So you have all this extra blood. And that doesn't mean you'll lose it literally as blood. But also as sweat and as urine. So my first night or the first couple hours after I've had a baby I spent up and down from the bathroom just peeing a whole lot and getting that sensation back in the bladder and getting rid of all the extra fluid. So that's kind of a fun fact of the immediate postpartum as well. But, again, it's just a really sacred special time, I think, for mom and baby and the family and a unique time physically just to be so soon after birth and to know what to watch for and what to look for. And just, again, basing it on how you feel. Most, again, normal, healthy women that give birth at home even alone are going to feel great and fine. And maybe tired but are able to get up out of bed and pee and probably want a meal and can function just like normal although you might be tired.

So that's how I felt, and I actually felt really great, like I said. Got up and got a shower. And kind of cleaned off and got back in bed, and that's where I've been pretty much ever since. On and off at least to get up again to eat and that kind of thing. But for the first five days, I try and stay pretty close to the bed, if not in it. Napping and resting. The newborn, I think, is just such an interesting little creature. Of course, they're beautiful and special. And if you think about the adaptations they have to make to life on the outside, I think it's mind blowing that we all did this, and that we can watch our

babies adapt so well. So technically speaking, even their heart and lungs weren't functioning the way they are now on the outside. They were functioning different in utero with fetal circulation.

So at a very core level, her body hasn't operated this way before. So I think that's amazing that they kind of take it all in stride. And on top of that learn to breathe air and touch fabric and attach themselves to a food source and learn how to suck and swallow. Of course, those are reflexes. But very necessary ones. Peeing, of course. They do do that in the womb. Most don't poop in the womb. So getting used to taking in a food source through the mouth and pooping and peeing it out is a whole new thing for a baby. For a newborn. So I always find myself in deep respect for the newborn. Not only because this one happens to be mine but for all newborns just because they're so adaptable really. And if you kind of watch how they take it in, it's little by little. They do sleep a lot. And I think that's sort of a necessary mechanism just because they probably get over stimulated, and they need to grow. So that's part of why they sleep too.

But just the immediacy with which this baby attached herself to the breast and really hasn't let go much since, I think is amazing that she knows that's what she needs and where she wants to be. And if I do get up for more than a couple minutes to take a shower or whatever, then she is wanting me. She knows that I'm gone and wants to be skin to skin. So skin to skin that's another really important point of the immediate postpartum and early postpartum, I think. To each her own. And there are many births I've attended where despite the education given or advice given—whatever—that parents have the baby dressed within hours. And that's how they're going to do it.

So that's sort of what we're used to hearing or seeing, I think, in more mainstream culture. And especially if you birth in a hospital, they're going to dress that baby or at least put a hat on it and a blanket and all that nonsense right away. But here at home when there is nobody orchestrating that, why would I clothe my baby? I am naked. She is naked. At least our top halves are. Or at least my top half is because it's essential that she get warm from my skin especially in the immediate postpartum. So when she was born downstairs and our house was pretty cold, but she didn't need a hat. She didn't need blankets. She didn't need towels because she had me. She was on me. And she never left me. We are heaters. So those heaters they have in the hospital—all those incubators—those are sort of false step ins for us for being the mom.

Some babies need to stay skin to skin. And not only is it great for temperature regulation but we need it for bonding. We need to feel each other and smell each other. And amniotic fluid and blood and vernix and all the things that people will say is ick, they're not. They're important substances that unite us with our babies. So she has not been dressed yet. She's been naked except for a cloth diaper since she is peeing a

whole lot. But initially, we were just naked. And, again, that helps with bonding and attachment and also milk production. So typically, the milk doesn't come in until about day three on average.

And I've experienced that especially with my first couple babies. But I don't know if it's the skin to skin or what it is, but I'd say the last couple including this one the milk has been in almost at 24 hours. Not fully. But half way, I'd say. So there is something about the skin to skin connection. Not leaving the baby. Not dressing the baby. Just smelling the baby. No hats. No nothing. That I think our bodies get the signal faster that, "Hey, you're not pregnant anymore. There is someone here. And the someone needs milk. So start making it."

So that's something I'd really recommend looking into that more and being comfortable with the idea of your baby not really needing anything but you. If the room is cold, then the baby needs to be on you. And even if the room is hot, the baby needs to be on you. If you dress a newborn and—well, let's say if you don't dress a newborn and put them down and they're naked, obviously, they could get cold enough to become—to go into respiratory distress or to become sick. And the same with hot. If the room is too hot and you put a naked newborn down, the newborn could overheat. They don't have the mechanism that early on like we do to regulate our body temperature.

So it's just essential that we keep them skin to skin. And my husband actually hasn't held her yet. But for a moment, he was going to when I was about to birth the placenta. I ended up just holding her and doing it. That's one of my powerful moments, I think, in birth is birthing the placenta just completely on my own. But the cord was pretty shot. So in past births, I've asked him to hold the baby with his shirt off. Again, skin to skin. While I birthed the placenta just because I can have both hands. But her cord was short enough that I just figured I'll just keep holding her and do it with the other hand. But that was—if he was going to hold her or if you're going to have someone hold the baby for a microsecond or a minute or if you are going to get up and take a shower, then preferably it's the dad of the baby. The partner. And that he is skin to skin as well with the baby.

And the same can be said for siblings. I mean passing the baby around really early isn't the greatest idea. Again for milk production and bonding and probably even germs. But if you're going to get up to take a shower, then a sibling could hold the baby as well. But skin to skin. So that's kind of the general rule. No hats. No blankets. No clothes. And this can go on for as many days as you're comfortable with. You laying there naked kind of ensures that you'll stay in bed nursing which is a good thing. It ensures that visitors will probably stay away. Makes most people kind of uncomfortable. So it can be a really good thing to just kind of lay in with the baby as long as you can. It's a time you never get back anyway. There's not many more times with an older baby that

you're going to lay around naked in most cases unless you have a breast infection or something like that. But, again, it's just a really special time. No clothes. No nothing. You'll know when it's time. Either you're going to get up out of bed and leave the room or the house. Or it'll become clear.

But there's always something kind of bittersweet, I guess I could say, about dressing a newborn for the first time. Just something about looking at their pure, beautiful, soft baby skin and imposing fabric—even the nicest of fabrics—onto that skin and pulling their little arms through the holes. It's just something that we all get used to. And we all do. But we didn't start that way. And it's just sort of a milestone already. A growing up milestone of putting on that first outfit. So I'm not one to rush into that personally. My daughters get excited about dressing her. They've had outfits picked out for days that we haven't used yet. And I suppose parents—there's some mom and dads like that too who just can't wait to get that first outfit on and take pictures. So I understand. That's just not me. I like to relish the naked newborn time. It's just so rare.

So let's see. What else? Newborns sleep a lot. They nurse a lot. I kind of couldn't say that enough. There probably should be a separate podcast sometime on nursing a newborn, but that's not today. All I can say, if you haven't nursed a baby before, is that newborns nurse all the time. All of the time. And that's how it should be. There's no schedule. There's just when a baby wants to suck you offer the breast. And for people that are getting used to these ideas of attachment and bonding, it's normal to think, at first, "Oh my gosh. How on earth could this baby be hungry this much? Who needs to eat every hour or every half an hour?" But that's not actually the only reason newborns need to nurse.

So, again, it's to stay warm, to stay next to you, stay connected. They receive doses of oxytocin and endorphins when they nurse and through the milk. So it feels good for them to nurse. And sucking is a reflex. They need to suck. So it's not just about getting milk as a result. It's about actually sucking and promoting that brain development. So anybody that tells you, "Your newborn nurses too much, or your baby nurses too much and needs to be on a schedule," really ignore them because they're from somewhere else. A different time where moms did put babies on schedules and that kind of thing. But that is not the way of the attachment parenting, for lack of a better word. Or just physiological birth and mothering. I mean really.

It's nothing fancy. It's just this is how animals, mammals, were made to be. When the mammal is born, it nurses. And it nurses all the time. And that's how it survives. So can't say enough about that. Again, probably a different podcast. Here her cord, at day three or four, is pretty shriveled up and black. Getting a little bit stinky. But that's normal. The flesh—it essentially was flesh. The cord. And it's getting ready to fall off, I'm sure, in the next couple days. But I don't put anything on it. No preservatives. I

mean no alcohol. No nothing. The most I could have done—which I haven't this time at all—is put her in the herb bath with me. And allow her to sit in the bath with me and allow the herbs to heal it and dry it out. I could. But I just haven't put her in the bath with me yet.

I've taken a bath every day since she's been born. And it's a sitz bath of herbs. So a sitz bath to some people—and I suppose maybe the official definition actually is just a bath for your bottom area. And some people do that literally sitting on the toilet. But there's no reason you can't do it in the bath tub and fill it up a little bit more and get at least a decent bath out of it. So I've had herbs. Organic herbs. Made by someone here in town. And Dead Sea salt. You can add garlic. And you basically brew up a pot of tea every day. A huge stock pot of tea. And then add it to the bath water and just soak in the bath sitting 15, 20 minutes. And any swelling, any tears, any abrasions, anything you have down vaginally or in your perineal area will heal up marvelously. So that's something I've done for probably all my births. And that I would continue to do and recommend because it's an amazing, healing thing that just feels good. And it gives you that 15 minutes where you can just sit there. Not that you're not sitting already. But just a different place and space to absorb all that has gone on.

So the last thing I'll say just to kind of wrap it up since I don't have a real outline here is the emotional changes in the first couple days I think are worth mentioning. Just because I'm really feeling them and I don't want to miss that at all. It's easy to forget when you're not in it. But just this amazing birth high for sure that comes with the birth experience. And I will admit that comes with usually a positive birth experience. So if that hasn't been yours for whatever reason then the high can be not there or altered or different. But if you've had a decent experience or one that you planned for or at home—I don't know. It can look a million different ways. But I was pretty high after this birth as I've been for all of them really. And a lot of that is just hormonal. Having the baby out. You're at the highest level of sort of feeling good that you ever will be in your life. It's just the most amazing moments.

And I think that's what I look forward to for sure in my own births and even when I witness other births. That that's the moment when the baby comes out. And that moment of bliss and satisfaction and love and accomplishment. There are no words really. So the bad news, I think—if there is bad news about that, which there really isn't—is unfortunately it kind of has to go down from there. And I think most of us feel that no matter what kind of birth experience we've had. That you're on this amazing high for 24 hours or a day or two. And then by the third day it's just—it starts to wear off. And that's how it's supposed to be because your body is coming back to earth and starting to shift from having been pregnant into being a nursing mother now.

So that can feel different ways for different people for sure. I know I haven't felt the same exact way for all of mine. And some have been easier than others. And I couldn't tell you why. It's just some are easier than others. But about day three—so for me that was yesterday—I had a pretty good drop in hormones I'd imagine. Just felt really weepy when I woke up and sort of impatient and tired. Just not great in comparison to the two days before. And on a physiological level, we could say, "Well, the milk is coming in," and that is a good reason because the hormones do shift immensely for the milk to flow.

So the old midwives' saying is something like, "The tears flow on the day the milk comes in." I'm sure it's more poetic than that. But when the milk flow, the tears flow or something like that. And I think it's true for most of us. Even if we're not sitting here bawling or crying that we feel it. It's sort of the enormity of the experience hits us and even the best birth in the world we can sort of choke up about and relive it. Or if things didn't go the way we wanted then they're definitely magnified, and it can be a time for examining the beginnings of birth trauma or whatever you want to call it.

So it's sort of a very serious moment in time. Again, that was me yesterday. And I woke up just feeling very serious about everything. And your rational brain can look in and say, "There's no problem. I mean you had this great birth. And here you are laying here with this gorgeous, healthy baby, and all is well." Yes. Yes. And I'm so grateful for that. But there is something irrational. Sort of—not that hormones are irrational. But there is something else that's going on in our bodies that makes us want to cry about everything and just feel like the world is a really hard place for a couple hours or maybe a day or two. And for some women longer. And gratefully, that hasn't been my experience. For me, it's pretty limited in time.

But not for everybody. I do think that our birth experiences majorly shape our attitude postpartum and our feelings and the way we adapt to the world. So if you're experiencing long term depression or more than a couple days or weeks, then that's probably not necessarily normal. And you definitely want to talk to someone about that. But, again, this sort of transient, not feeling great, feeling kind of grump and sad is pretty normal. And not something everyone experiences. So doesn't have to happen. I've had at least a couple where I felt nothing like that at all. Just completely blissful and sort of floated to the next stage.

But I think one of the lessons of the postpartum for me is that it's—for me, it's very up and down. So there are days that just are really great. And baby is nursing well, and you're sleeping well. And then the next couple aren't. And you'll find, I think, they're often based on sleeping. So some babies just want to nurse all night. And when you lose enough sleep over time, things become distorted, and things seem harder than they are. At least I think so. The other thing is nutrition. So keeping up on your nutrition postpartum is essential. And I say that for my own reminder as well. It's easy,

in a way, to sort of forget about eating. You're not pregnant anymore. You don't feel like you need to eat hourly at least. But you do need really good nutrition at least a couple meals a day. Some snacks. And for me, I focus on really good fats, protein, lots of fluid in the form of teas, water. Yeah. So I have to pay more attention than I want to, I think. I think it would be nice to just sort of not eat postpartum. Just worry about the baby. I'm so sick of eating after a pregnancy of eating.

But no. That is a key element in maintaining, I think, stability. Emotional stability. Is eating and sleeping. So you can kind of look into what that means for you diet wise. But, again, we're using lots of calories to nurse our babies and to make milk, so we do need food. And it does need to be good nutritious food. Bone broth has been one of my saviors this time. I was very happy with myself for making a couple batches and freezing it, so that I have a cup of broth every day for the first couple weeks. It's just really nourishing.

So all the nourishing, real, whole foods that you can put into your body during this time, I think, are just so beneficial. And the last but not least thing is the placenta. Mine is raw. So when the placenta was birthed, I kept it attached for a little bit and then had a friend, Margo, cut up the placenta into tiny, tiny, pill size pieces and freeze them. So twice a day, morning and evening, I take out a couple pieces of placenta, swallow them. I don't taste them or anything. Just with kombucha I do. Or you could do juice or some kind of natural soda or whatever. Just something sort of really strong to mask any taste. And I truly don't taste it. I just put it in the back of my mouth like a pill and swallow a couple pieces.

So I do think that helps me at least with feeling grounded and getting back to normal health and stability both physically and emotionally over the next couple weeks. So I will continue to do that, but it is an essential part of the early postpartum for me. I don't want to miss that because it's just needed so early. I don't want to wait a week or two to start doing that because really I need it now. The time of biggest adjustment is right now as we all get situated and settled.

So I think that's the early postpartum for me. At least sitting here with my baby, who is probably going to wake up soon and want to nurse again on the other side. So thanks for listening. Thanks for sharing with me in this journey and now this postpartum journey of this baby and getting back to a non pregnant state. Thanks so much for listening.

(closing music)