

(introductory music)

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MARYN: Welcome to Indie Birth's series of podcasts here on iTunes, *Taking Back Birth*. Hi. I'm Maryn, and I have done these podcasts for the past nine or ten months, at this point. I've got a whole bunch from the very moment I realized I was pregnant with our seventh baby. And now the baby is here, and we're a month in already. Little Ever Wild is five weeks. And I haven't recorded anything in a couple weeks. I did record when she was super new about the immediate postpartum, if you haven't heard that one. You may have heard the podcast on preparing for the postpartum a couple weeks ago. Before the birth, I recorded that one. And it was all about respecting this unique space that we're in after we have a baby, about honoring our bodies and the process we've just been through as well as the process we're about to go through which is mothering this new child and adapting to life with another person.

So if not, listen to that one because it's similar in a sense to this one. But it might give you some more information about how to prepare for these days after baby and how to ask your community and your family for help and just the beauty really of having a new baby in that immediate space of post birth. It's such a glorious stage. But I'm not in that anymore actually. It's already past. All the lead up to labor and birth has happened. It was a wonderful birth. You can read Ever Wild's free birth story on our indiebirth.com site. And, again, the last podcast was about immediate postpartum when I was lying there with her the first couple days and what I was thinking and doing. Not much. I wasn't doing much. But just loving her and enjoying that sacred time.

So today we kind of move on as life does oh so quickly. And we're going to talk about the postpartum body. Our postpartum bodies. Our after baby bodies. In this immediate—almost immediate space. Not super immediate but in the grand picture of things still pretty close to having had a baby. First month. First five weeks. That's where I'm at. And what goes on here for those of you that haven't had babies before. Or maybe you have and you just really haven't paid that much attention because many people by now are just totally back into the swing of life. And having had a baby is pretty much an afterthought. So hopefully this will encourage you to be gentle with yourself. To be considerate of your postpartum body, to love it, to understand what's going on. I am back in the swing of life at five weeks. But not fully yet. So I have—we have other kids and so I'm having to go out and do stuff. But I try to limit that to one thing a day at this point.

For myself. For my own body. My own mind and spirit. And also for Ever, who really hasn't been in the car very much at this point. And I like to still limit that if possible. So if I have to put her in the car once a day for a short trip, it's not the end of the world. If there's day where she doesn't have to go anywhere or I don't have to go anywhere, that's even better. So I'm still in a very sacred place even though I am partly back in the world is what I'm trying to say. And, again, if you listen to that postpartum podcast, you'll know more about the fourth trimester, which is essentially what this is. The first three months after baby.

So often in the more mainstream world, six weeks is the end of the postpartum period. And the reason for that is on the outside things are looking somewhat normal to being prepregnant although that's not necessarily true body wise. But that's kind of the thought. The bleeding is done. And the cervix and the uterus are back to normal, so you're done. You're not pregnant anymore. I am asking us all to reconsider that and, again, consider the first three months at least to be a time of sacredness and gentleness. So what happens with our bodies in the first month after birth? Where am I at? I thought I'd share that with you. Not something you hear every day on a podcast, but it's so important that I think women like us share our experiences so that other women don't feel alone. And we have this community even if it is a virtual community.

So everybody knows, hopefully, that bleeding—vaginal bleeding—happens after birth. And the reason for that is sort of similar to when you get your moon cycle or your period and you bleed monthly. That's when the uterine lining is shedding. However, after birth although there is shedding that goes on as well to contribute to the bleeding, it's the placental site—the place where the placenta was attached to your uterus in your body—that really does need to heal. So even though you'll hear me say, "Birth isn't an illness. There's nothing wrong with us when we're pregnant or birthing," that's still true. However, in the postpartum period, we do actually need to heal this place, this wound where the placenta was. And our bodies do an amazing job of healing this without much help from us.

So the uterus is going to contract. It's going to stop the bleeding or minimize the bleeding over the first day, over the first weeks. And so by this point, about five weeks out, I'm not bleeding anymore. My bleeding went on for longer I think than I hear some women's do. I think it's more typical to bleed for two to three weeks, if you're taking care of yourself. So that starts off as a pretty normal kind of period type flow. Pretty heavy right after birth. And then, obviously, it gets less and less and less. And so by three weeks, it's nothing or maybe just spotting. And yeah. That's where I'm at about a month out. Not bleeding anymore.

And so once the bleeding completely stops—which it has for me—if I were to start bleeding or spotting again in the next month or couple of months, then I would have my

antenna up that perhaps this was my cycle coming back. I know many women that that has happened to immediately—almost immediately—maybe even at six weeks. And the things we know that suppress menstrual cycle such as on demand nursing, sleeping with your baby, wearing your baby—some women it just doesn't apply to. And so if you don't know if you're one, just be cautious that any bleeding you have after the postpartum bleeding ends could be indicative of ovulation or, again, some kind of menstrual shedding of your uterus.

So if that's the case, you could get pregnant again at six weeks which—I don't know—to me sounds not ideal. I'm not one that gets my cycle back at six weeks. However, it could happen. It could really happen to anybody. I normally go about—well, for some, it's only been seven or eight months. And then for some, it's been longer. And I couldn't tell you why I have had that difference. I guess more typically it's been about eight months. So that's it for the bleeding really. I suppose textbook wise some women could bleed eight weeks—six to eight weeks. I don't hear about that so much. So if something like that is going on for you, it's probably not anything really scary, but you may want to look into that.

I know acupuncture has helped me when I felt like the bleeding was strange in the first month. And by that, I mean stop and start kind of bleeding or darker blood that turns into bright red again. There's a lot of variation on postpartum bleeding that, again, women don't really talk about. Maybe it's not as interesting to some. But I work with women, so I hear more about it. And even textbook wise if you were to look into midwifery texts or even obstetrical texts, nobody really talks about the variation on postpartum bleeding. They act like it just starts and dies down, and that's all you have. But I know, again, that some of us have sort of strange patterns especially when we've had a bunch of kids for whatever reason. I don't know if that's hormonal or just the uterus kind of working things out. But if you have some sort of strange pattern, you might want to look into it. Or if you're really feeling fine and there's nothing else going on then you just kind of wait and see. And it almost always eventually resolves in a normal amount of time.

So bleeding. That was bleeding. How about breasts? Let's see. Obviously, huge changes to the breasts and the nipples especially if you've never nursed before. And wow. What a postpartum body change if you've never nursed a baby before to be at this point about a month out. Yeah. I would have to really reach back in my memory for exactly how that feels, to be honest, because the first time was almost 12 years ago for me. But yes. What a change. Breasts that are full of milk. Nipples that are always being wanted by your baby. And yeah. It's a whole different thing. So hopefully, at this point, anybody listening that is nursing for the first time or—heck—even the third time is feeling pretty comfortable at this point. Meaning the breasts have sort of figured out how much milk to make at various moments in time and aren't super engorged anymore

because the baby has really regulated this already. That can take up to six weeks really.

So no pumping. No interfering with what the body is doing in the first six weeks. That way the breasts can regulate the milk supply. Hopefully, nobody is dealing with cracked or hurting nipples anymore. That can be common early on as the baby is learning to latch and/or some women have nipples that are sort of more prone to that. But again, hopefully at this point, everything is feeling good. And even if you're not feeling confident nursing out and about, you're feeling good about nursing at home and nursing the baby on demand as much as the baby wants. And hopefully getting some sleep. That might be a little far reaching for some of us. Some people just have babies that sleep more at night. I seem to right now, but I wouldn't put my money on it staying that way just because things change so much.

So the way our bodies are going through these rapid changes in the first couple months, I really believe the babies are too. For many different reasons. But their need for nursing and calories and fat and all that are vastly changing. So a growth spurt happens here and there. It's kind of different for every baby where they might want to nurse—oh my gosh. Every five minutes for a couple hours. Or all night and then sleep all day. So, again, lots of changes. Not just in our bodies even though we're talking about our bodies today.

So that's breasts. Belly wrapping and sort of abdominal shape and tone is pretty hard to come by, I think, at this point. If you had super amazing abdominal tone before—and this is maybe your first or second baby—then perhaps you're feeling more confident about that a month after baby has been born. I've had seven. And although I am in pretty good shape, I don't really have any major complaints. My belly looks like I've had a baby. And it certainly comes down just as the uterus does. So it's not looking like I'm eight months pregnant anymore. Thank goodness. But probably three or four months pregnant at least is the way it's looking.

So I did wrap my belly immediately after birth or almost immediately. And I did that just with a really long piece of organic cotton that Margo was able to get for me from a friend. And that felt really good immediately. To wrap my belly. And I stopped doing it daily probably a couple weeks ago. Initially, I was wearing it all day but not at night. And it just helped kind of put the organs back where they go. And it gave me a feeling of stability. I don't wear it anymore unless I'm going to wear Ever in the Ergo or another carrier. It's my understanding and it does feel good to me that wrapping your belly—it also kind of stabilizes your back. And if you're going to be wearing a baby in a carrier then it puts less strain on all those muscles. Because, of course, your abdominals and your back muscles are kind of all intertwined and they pretty much take a beating during pregnancy. At least for most people. Just your posture and the weight of the belly.

So in the postpartum period, it's not about, to me, working out. That's not where I'm at although I probably wouldn't have said that 11 years ago. But I also injured myself 11 years ago getting back into sort of athletic activity way too soon. So I learned my lesson. And so here I am now with seven kids, and that's just not a priority. I want to be healthy. I want to be strong. But I'm not in a rush to be burning calories frankly. That's just not where I am at with a one month old. But, again, belly wrapping is feeling good. And I want to slowly get my abdominals back in shape. If you have a—what they call—diastasis, which is a space between your abdominals—and you could look online how to check that. It's really easy to check on yourself to see how many fingers you can fit in this gap often.

And most of us, after we've had a baby, at least a finger can fit because the muscles have separated at least slightly. And then I've had up to three or four fingers be able to fit in that gap with previous pregnancies. I think I'm at about three now. So there are exercises you can do. Just really gentle exercises to, again, help these muscles go back together. And is it a cosmetic thing? Yes. It is partly because no matter how much weight one loses—if that's part of your goal now or later—if you have this gap between your abdominals, you're still going to have a belly pouch, which I think we all think about that. Nobody really wants to look pregnant after they're not pregnant anymore. But it's a slow process.

So if you're interested in that, I'm sure there are things online you can look at. One of my favorite resources—although it's not as cut and dry to sort of search and find online—is again Katie Bowman's information and research. I've talked about her through many podcasts. And truthfully, if you are following her protocol as far as stretching, wearing barefoot shoes, doing lots of walking during pregnancy, I found, for me, that the recover—the physical body recovery—has been so much easier this time. And I really do give credit to Katie and her research and her information because with seven babies I wouldn't expect that. I also don't know what else to attribute it to. I did do a lot of her stuff during pregnancy. And not even a ton really. I mean a couple stretches a day. I really got good at squatting, which is actually how Ever came into this world. And I'm pretty religious about the barefoot shoes and that kind of thing.

So it really has made a difference for me. She has exercises in her book, on her blog. And they deal with these kind of things. Getting these abdominal muscles back together. Strengthening your pelvic floor, which if you don't already know. Kegels and that kind of thing—don't do them. She has really great information to prove to you that that's not where you want to be especially postpartum. So I can't go into all the exercises here. It would be hard to explain them anyway. But if you were able to get her information and just start doing some of her stretches and her really slow abdominal exercises as well as starting to get out there and walk which is one of her major

recommendations at—for anybody at any point in life. Is that we all walk several miles a day. And, again, with barefoot shoes or earth shoes or no shoes, if you can.

And so that's where I'm at in the last month. Probably at about three weeks I started getting out more regularly. I got out a couple times before three weeks, but it wasn't feeling great. I would often be really tired and bleeding more when I got home. So at about three weeks, I started getting out more. Wearing the baby and my barefoot shoes. And I'm out on the trail here. We have tons of trails, which I'm very grateful for. So much more gentle than road walking. But you've got what you've got. So if that's it, get out there now, if you can. And just start walking. And it can be slow and gentle. And you have your baby on you. And you might need to stop and nurse or nurse the baby in the carrier. But it has felt really good for me. And I know that along with the stretching and that kind of thing, it definitely gets me back to feeling more like myself although I'm not really myself yet. And I think that's something I did want to mention.

At least for me, personally, that I feel in a really unique space right now. So there's so many parts of pregnancy that feel this way to me. Is just sort of a step—a step up to something else. To feeling different or being in a new place in the pregnancy. Maybe these are the steps down back to your—what you would consider your normal body. And I'm not at my normal body yet. And I wouldn't expect that for several months. And even mentally and emotionally. Not back to where I was at before getting pregnant. So trying to love where I'm at. Trying to love my unique space and knowing that I won't pass this way again. At least with this baby. I may never pass this way again at all. Ever.

And little Ever is so small and still very much a newborn. So I look at my body, and I try to be very grateful for what I see in the mirror and what I feel knowing that it won't last forever. That I have, hopefully, lots of time to get back in shape and get back to calling my body my own. Right now it's kind of not. It's very much hers just like it was during pregnancy. So be gentle with yourself. I think that's my overriding advice having been there many times. I wasn't as gentle with myself, as I mentioned, the first pregnancy. Or rather the first postpartum and the second postpartum. The first postpartum—I think at four weeks postpartum I was running a race. That sounds absolutely crazy to me. I don't know what I was thinking.

But I didn't have support in this sort of postpartum. I didn't have support in breastfeeding. And the world went back to normal. And I wanted to be there again. I very much hurt my knee, in fact. My knee has actually never recovered. And I think the reasoning is pretty simple. My body just wasn't ready, obviously. And we still have hormones just figuring themselves out at this point. So this isn't about how we feel emotionally. But just to mention it. There's still so many ups and downs. I know for me. Not the extreme of up and down that I felt maybe in the first three days or the first week

or two. But definitely emotional still. And so I think that plays into part of it with the hormones.

But those hormones can also affect our actual skeleton, right? So if we had relaxin during pregnancy and at the end to enable our bodies to open up, then it's figuring itself out. And at four weeks postpartum, I can bet you I still had relaxin. So my knee just kind of went out and, again, it's never been back. So that's really bad advice. I would never, ever want to hear anybody doing what I had done. But I've learned over seven pregnancies. And I know that we need to be gentle. I need to be gentle with myself. That I might not get out and hike for more than 20 minutes. And some days I might not get out at all. And it's just taking a breath and not getting too frustrated with that. Just knowing that it'll come. That my body will come back into alignment like it always does. That I will have more energy soon. But if I don't take care of myself now, then at four months it's possible I feel not so great. And I know many women that feel that way at about three, four months.

Actually, their breast milk supply goes down. They're exhausted. Their hair starts falling out which that, by itself, isn't totally abnormal. I think that happens to many of us. It certainly happens to me. But just not feeling good. So that's my goal is to treat this period really gentle even though I'm a month after having a baby. I'm not a day. I'm still trying to be gentle because I don't want to be that person at three or four months postpartum that is completely exhausted and overwhelmed and life is hard. And people have totally forgotten by then too that you've even had a baby. There's not too much sympathy or help. If you had any help before maybe with meals or the kids, by three, four months, you're on your own. So you have to, in my opinion, get all your strength right now. You have to.

And so, hopefully, you did your immediate postpartum taking care of yourself. But now still so much the case. So nutrition wise. I think that's a really relevant for talking about our bodies. Many women—and I've been one of them in previous postpartums. Just kind of forget to eat. Eating became such a chore during pregnancy that at this point it's like, "Oh god. I never want to eat again. I never—I don't want to think about it." And you can get by with so much less. You don't have a person inside of you anymore literally kicking you to eat. So I know I felt that relief of not needing to be on top of my nutrition. But for me, I've learned that I do need to be on top of my nutrition in a different way.

So for me, pregnancy means eating every hour pretty much. Maybe every two hours if I'm lucky. Eating when I'm not hungry. Sort of checking off the boxes in the—in the categories, so that I'm getting what I need as far as greens and protein and this and that. I'm still conscious of these categories, but I'm more conscious, I suppose, of getting lots of good fat. I feel like that really helps me when I'm nursing. because if you

get lots of great fat at any given meal, then you stay full. At least I do. Nursing for quite awhile. So I don't have that annoyance of needing to eat every hour. But yet, I'm fed. And I'm fed with good stuff that will make great milk. And the good fats, of course, are going to help overall with your body function and your hormonal function. And hopefully, your hair and your skin as that sort of transitions as well in the next couple months.

So it is important to get calories. And although we can get away with not eating or getting a thousand calories a day—because I know on some days I do that—not intentionally, we can get away with that. Our bodies will still make milk. Women in third world countries that don't have access to hardly anything at all still can make milk. So don't let that fool you. Your body can still get very depleted. And, again, we're looking at the long term here. So three months out because you didn't eat for the last three months, how are you going to feel? It's not just about the number on the scale going down. It's about nourishing our bodies.

And truthfully just depending on our own individual make up not eating doesn't necessarily make the scale go down in the postpartum period. For whatever reason. Our bodies are holding onto the fat we have to give to our babies. So my advice is with whatever diet or food type you have that you still incorporate lots of great fat. So for me, that's lots of grass-fed butter and avocados. At least one every day. Lots of coconut oil. Olive oil on salads. Nuts, of course. There's lots of ways to go about it. But again, I like it because I'm not eating all the time. But I am eating—I am getting plenty of calories when I do eat. And that's going to go through the breast milk. Anything you eat is going to go through. And from what I've read and even given the history of my family and my children, we often are prone to allergies and skin type stuff that the good fats can help that. And if Ever can get as much as she can of that through my milk, then it's better for her.

So supplements are often a part of our diet. I'm not going to go into tons of detail. I think there are really valuable supplements in the postpartum period. Even just to keep the immune system up, if you are feeling depleted or sort of depressed. Not emotionally depressed. Just sort of your body is a lull trying to get back together. Let's see. So besides those kind of supplements, I work closely with an acupuncturist, who is actually a really great friend of mind, and has been with me through many pregnancies and postpartums. She's very aware of me needing to nurture my body and not being depleted after seven kids. So she has some herbs that she has me on. I do try and go for acupuncture when I can. Bring the baby. But not—again, not going out a whole lot. Not looking for a lot of outside care. Just knowing that for me food can mostly take care of it.

The placenta, of course, is a great supplement. And, hopefully, anybody listening took that back whatever that means to you. I do it raw. And we do have an article and a video, actually, on our website of how to prepare your own placenta raw. It's not hard. It's just a video of Margo being cute and talking about how to cut it up and how to store it. So on the Indie Birth site, you can look for that. It's a DIY placenta article and video.

But I finished my placenta—gosh. I think I—it lasted a month. I tried to take it every day. I was pretty close. And I took a dose in the morning and at night. Just kind of swallowed it. So that, for me, was a major supplement and a major component of my postpartum body coming back together or trying in these last few weeks. So supplements, again, would just be, I think, anything nourishing that you feel like you're not getting from food and/or if you're working with somebody that has ideas about how to nourish pregnant women. I think we can use all the help we can get, at least that's how I feel. I can certainly use all the help I can get. But I don't need to be taking 20 pills every day either. That doesn't feel right to me.

So thyroid health is just something to mention briefly before I sign off here. Our thyroids can go through lots of changes postpartum. And if someone's thyroid is going to go through a change in their life, I think postpartum is actually one of the most common times for that to happen. So in seven kids, I haven't had any major problems. But if you look up the signs of hypothyroid, which is what more of us would be postpartum for sure, it's hard to distinguish just by those signs. Because being tired is one. Well, obviously, in the postpartum period, many of us are tired. We're just not sleeping and that kind of thing.

But it is something to be aware of, I think, in the first couple months out. If you have somebody to work with, a naturopathic doctor, or, again, an acupuncturist or somebody like that. Or you can just support your thyroid if you think it needs it in so many natural ways that don't commit you to anything major like medication. Essential oils. There's lots of good thyroid support. I feel like resting, honestly. That kind of sounds silly. But I think in the postpartum period there's so many women that I know here anyway, "Oh, the thyroid is off. Or the adrenals are stressed." And yes. We do have the ability to have these things happen to our bodies in the postpartum period. But we do need to remember that before we go diagnose ourselves with something or start medicating it, the best thing we can do for ourselves is rest. And nurture ourselves and nourish ourselves. And, again, that's through food and love and asking for help and taking a nap with the baby, if we can.

So postpartum body. I can't believe it encompasses all those things. But your body often gives us—gives you signs of needing those things in the postpartum period. And it's not a red flag often. For most normal, healthy people that have had a baby, it's not bad to be tired during this period or need to take a nap or who knows what. So, again, I

guess my final message here is to enjoy where you're at, if you can. Don't worry about weight loss yet or any of those kind of things. Don't even step on the scale, if you can help it. Just love where you're at. Look at your body and say, "Thank you. You brought this baby here and this placenta here in a healthy way." And it's still so new. There's months and months ahead to focus more on yourself as an individual. But right now the postpartum body is in between. In between worlds. Just like so much of this childbearing year.

So thanks so much for listening today even though I don't know who is listening. I'm always sort of feeling supported actually as I do these podcasts. I know people really appreciate them. And this is my first one back really, so it feels good to be back and talk about such beautiful, wonderful stuff. Please check out the indiebirth.com site, if you haven't. We have so many wonderful things. All these free podcasts. Free blog posts. We do have classes. Online childbirth classes that you can do at your own pace. We have free consultations every Monday that are 20 minutes long where Margo or I will call you and discuss whatever you want. So we are reaching out to you. We are wanting to hear what you have to say. We are wanting to help you, if we can. So please go there and find out what we have. Thanks again. Have a great day.

(closing music)