

Welcome to the amazing world of placentophagia! While this practice has been done for thousands and thousands of years by most land mammals and in many cultures, its popularity in the United States is just beginning to grow and will hopefully become a normalized part of the early postpartum period, aiding women in the smooth transition between pregnancy and postpartum in many unique ways.

So what is placentophagia?

The term placentophagia quite literally means the consumption or ingesting of the placenta after a mother gives birth. While placentophagia extends to the father and other family members in some cultures, what is discussed here is strictly in reference to the mother ingesting her own placenta as soon after she gives birth as possible to help her reap the many nutritional, hormonal, and chemical benefits from her placenta as possible. There are many ways to ingest the placenta after birth, such as consuming it raw either alone or in a smoothie form, consuming it after it is cooked in a variety of ways, including interesting dishes such as placenta lasagna and placenta spaghetti. The method of placentophagia that is discussed herein is the practice of drying, grinding, and then encapsulating the placenta to be taken in pill-form so that as many nutrients, hormones, and natural chemicals as possible remain intact in the placenta powder, thus allowing the mother to take as many doses of her placenta pills as she needs, without having to taste or chew the placenta!

HOME PAGE: "Giving...placenta to a new mother following birth has become standard protocol among a growing number of midwives in the United States. By nourishing the blood and fluids, endocrine glands and organs, Placenta will ...reduce or stop postpartum bleeding, speed up recovery, boost energy and relieve postpartum blues." Homes, Peter. 1993. Jade Remedies, Snow Lotus Press, 352.

Why ingest the placenta?

This question is one that almost everyone asks when introduced to the idea of consuming an organ...it is, after all, exactly that. However, unlike other bodily organs, the placenta is unique in that we are not born with it; in the amazing forethought of our Maker, as women, our bodies have been equipped with the ability to create an organ (the placenta) early in pregnancy to sustain and nourish our pregnancies and the incredible baby(ies) growing inside our wombs. The placenta starts its job in the first trimester and continues its important live-giving, nourishing tasks all the way through pregnancy until birth, when it is no longer needed, and then expelled as what many refer to as the "after birth". During pregnancy, the placenta takes over hormone production, creating the hormones our bodies need to sustain a healthy pregnancy. The placenta also provides unquantifiable amounts of vitamins and minerals, such as vitamin B6, iron, oxytocin, prostaglandins, prolactin, Corticotropin-Releasing Hormone (CRH), gonadotrophin, thyroid stimulating hormone, cortisone, interferon, hemoglobin, Urokinase, gammaglobulin, and much, much more; all of which will be explained in greater detail later on. Ingesting the placenta in a way that keeps as many nutrients' and hormones' integrity intact as possible can effectively replenish the new mother's body after birth due to post partum blood loss, outside stress, and other factors. So what does this mean to the woman who has just given birth? Let's find out!

Post Partum Depression

Postpartum depression occurs after a woman gives birth to her infant(s) and begins as what is most-widely known as “the baby blues.” Ingesting the placenta has been shown to lessen or prevent the onset of the baby blues which can become postpartum depression within a matter of days. How does placentophagia help accomplish this? One way that ingesting the placenta can help stave off baby blues and post partum depression is that it is rich in vitamin B6. Vitamin B6 aids in the body’s ability to properly process amino acids; the building blocks of all proteins and some hormones. Vitamin B6 is also essential for the body to manufacture melatonin, dopamine, and serotonin. Deficiencies in B6 can cause mental confusion, as well as lowered immune system function, skin lesions, and a lesser ability to heal wounds. (It is important to recognize that when the woman releases her placenta after the birth of her infant(s) that the site on the uterine wall where the placenta detached itself is now, basically, an open wound).

The placenta also contains very large amounts of a hormone called corticotropin-releasing hormone, or “CRH.” CRH is a known stress-reducer which is produced in the body’s hypothalamus. In pregnancy, the placenta takes over production of this hormone and, interestingly, in the third trimester, the level of CRH triples the normal amount usually found in the bloodstream. Equally interesting is that after birth, the level of CRH in the mother’s blood drops to slightly below normal levels because it takes time for the hypothalamus to get the signal to once again produce this hormone (according to a study performed by the National Institutes of Health). Consuming her encapsulated placenta, which contains this hormone, may help to restore the balance of CRH in the mother’s blood, thus enabling her to more effectively process and handle stress. CRH is also a crucial factor in unlocking stored energy, thereby increasing the mom’s energy levels. As you can imagine, stress reduction and increased energy can be vital in preventing the baby blues.

Oxytocin is another particularly important hormone that the body produces and is often referred to as the “love hormone.” Oxytocin is a key factor in promoting bonding between a mother and her baby or babies. It is known to give an over-all feeling of well-being for the mother and helps her to have that warm and relaxed sensation that we feel when we are content and happy. It is the same pleasure hormone the body releases in high amounts during love making.

Placentophagia and Postpartum Recovery

How Does Consuming Placenta Medicine Speed Recovery?

During pregnancy, the placenta stores many nutrients, such as vitamin B6 and other vitamins ingested through prenatal supplements and foods, iron, and hormones necessary for the proper growth and optimal health of the baby(ies). These nutrients are not only necessary for the fetus during pregnancy but are also essential components in facilitating a smooth transition between pregnancy and the early postpartum period. Let’s review the nutrients contained in the placenta and see how they help a mother’s body heal and rebuild its nutritive stores after childbirth.

Postpartum Bleeding

Oxytocin, as previously noted in the postpartum depression section, is the hormone that causes the uterus to contract during labor, thus dilating and effacing the cervix and aiding in the birth of the child during pushing. After the birth, once the umbilical cord stops pulsing and pumping iron-rich fetal blood into the newborn baby, oxytocin continues to cause the uterus to contract so that involution (the shrinking of the uterus back to pre-pregnancy size) can take place, thereby reducing the size of the uterine wall so that the placenta can detach itself and be born in a short time after the baby. Because the placenta contains both fetal and maternal blood, it contains within it enough oxytocin from labor to help the uterus to continue the important job of contracting if consumed after birth. The contractions after birth (also known as after pains) not only help the uterus to return to its pre-pregnancy size but also cause the muscle fibers in the uterus to contract and reduce bleeding by clamping the veins and capillaries that brought the mother's blood to the placenta which are left bleeding after the placenta detaches. For centuries, midwives have treated the occurrence of heavy bleeding or postpartum hemorrhage by taking a small piece of the maternal side of the placenta and placing it under the mother's tongue. Though it may make many a bit squeamish at the idea of doing such a thing, this practice has been known to significantly reduce heavy bleeding and even stop postpartum hemorrhage in its tracks! Placentophagia has saved many mothers' lives in this very way, either by stopping the bleeding completely, or slowing the bleeding enough that care providers are able to perform other measures to then stop the hemorrhage.

The placenta also contains high levels of prostaglandins which also causes involution (shrinking) of the uterus to pre-pregnancy size. Because of the shrinking and contracting caused by oxytocin and prostaglandins, the uterus basically cleans itself out.

Another component in the placenta is Urokinase inhibiting factor and factor XIII which stops bleeding by helping the body form clots.

Consuming the placenta in capsule form or in a smoothie consisting of raw placenta has been shown to greatly decrease the postpartum bleeding time (or lachoria) after birth.

Post partum Anemia

After the placenta is birthed, the mother is then left with what can most easily be described as an open wound on the wall of the uterus where the placenta was implanted and grew during the pregnancy. Immediately following birth, mothers lose a large amount of blood as a normal part of the birthing process. Whether the mother has normal postpartum blood loss or excessive postpartum blood loss, her body's iron stores are easily and commonly compromised. Because the placenta contains blood, by ingesting the placenta after birth, the body is able to regain highly beneficial amounts of iron that her body already had in her placenta, thus preventing or correcting anemia after childbirth.

Hemoglobin is also contained in the placenta and also aids in replenishing iron stores and guarding against anemia.

Postpartum Wounds, Pain, and Infection

Another way that ingesting the placenta aids in postpartum healing of the uterine wall is by providing the mother with beneficial amounts of vitamin B6. Vitamin B6 (or vit B6) acts in a number of ways, including aiding in the reduction of the occurrence or severity of postpartum depression and boosting energy levels, but it also aids in wound healing and immune function. Vit B6 also supports amino acid functions, which is important because amino acids are the building blocks of proteins and the uterus is a muscle; therefore, it needs proper protein use in the body to rebuild itself and stay healthy. B6 is also helpful to the mother who has perineal or vaginal tearing during birth, or an episiotomy since it aids in healing.

With the rigorous task of giving birth, mothers' immune systems are often knocked down for a time after the birth until she has regained energy and nutrients. Along with B6, the ingestion of the placenta also serves to renew the body's gammaglobulin interferon levels. Gammaglobulin and interferon are important immune system boosters that help the body to fight against postpartum infections of the uterus, as well as any vaginal or perineal tears or incisions after birth. If the mother had a c-section, gammaglobulin and interferon will help protect her against infections at the incision site as well.

Along with Vit B6, gammaglobulin, and interferon, Urokinase inhibiting factor and factor XIII is also contained in the placenta and stops bleeding by helping to form clots and enhances wound healing as it beings to repair damaged blood vessels.

Prostaglandins are also stored in the placenta which reduce swelling and causes involution of the uterus (shrinks the uterus back to pre-pregnancy size and tone), thus aiding in proper healing and reducing pain after childbirth by preventing uncomfortable swelling of the cervix, uterus, and other tissues, such as the perineum, that may have been affected during labor and birth.

Placental Opioid-Enhancing Factor, or "POEF," is a molecule found in the placenta and amniotic fluid that modifies the activity of endogenous opioids in a way that allows for the natural enhancement of reduction in pain that mothers experience during and just after delivery. By ingesting the placenta and absorbing POEF, a mother may then be able to reap the benefits of POEF after birth when she is experiencing after pains and cramping. The effect these opioids have on the mother's pain levels are similar to those experienced from taking pain medications after delivery.

Placentophagia can help mothers feel more energized and fight stress

Along with the many healing benefits of the placenta, placentophagia can also smooth transition from pregnancy to the postpartum period by boosting energy levels, fighting stress, and rebalancing hormone production. So which factors are contained in this amazing organ that support these functions? Let's take a look.

For a new mother, dealing with stress may be harder than expected, but can be made less so by taking hold of the amazing gift that her own body gives to her immediately after the birth of her baby(ies); the placenta. Thyroid stimulating hormone, cortisone, and Corticotropin-Releasing Hormone (CRH) are all key components in fighting and reducing stress. As all new parents can tell you, stress, both good and bad, are a large part of adjusting to life with a new baby. Oxytocin, known as the love hormone, also helps reduce pain reception in the brain while helping the mother to form a stronger bond with her

baby. The surge of oxytocin that is released when breastfeeding can be supplemented by ingesting the placenta and can create an over-all feeling of wellness and connectedness with those around her, or, more specifically, with her baby and partner. In the medical world, oxytocin is known to be highly addictive for these very reasons!

Gonadotrophin is an important hormone that is the precursor to the hormones progesterone, estrogen, and testosterone. Striking a balance between these hormones in the woman's body is essential not only for proper function of the reproductive system, but also in providing a balance in mood and thought.

Can Placenta Capsules Help with the Production of Breast-milk?

Yes! In very simple terms, prolactin is the main hormone in a mother's body that promotes lactation. Interestingly, the placenta contains high enough levels of prolactin to support a healthy milk supply for her newborn(s). Notice the amazing difference that was noted in lactating women after the ingestion of placenta medicine in the studies below:

"Powdered Placenta Hominis was used for 57 cases of insufficient lactation. Within 4 days, 48 women had markedly increased milk production, with the remainder following suit over the next three days." Bensky/Gamble. 1997. *Materia Medica*, Eastland Press, 549.

"All patients were given desiccated placenta prepared as previously described (C.A. II, 2492) in doses of 10 grains in a capsule 3 times a day. Only those mothers were chosen for the study whose parturition was normal and only the weights of those infants were recorded whose sole source of nourishment was mothers milk. The growth of 177 infants was studied. The rate of growth is increased by the ingestion of placenta by the mother... the maternal ingestion of dried placenta tissue so stimulates the tissues of the infants feeding on the milk produced during this time, that unit weight is able to add on greater increments of matter, from day to day, than can unit weight of infants feeding on milk from mothers not ingesting this substance." Hammett, Frederick. S. 1918. *The Journal of Biological Chemistry*, 36. American Society of Biological Chemists, Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, original press: Harvard University.

How Placenta Ingestion is Vital in Correcting Low Birth Weight in Infants and Aiding in Proper Weight Gain

Not only does placentophagia support the amount of breast-milk the mother makes, but also the quality of her milk because of the nutrients contained therein, including vit B6, which, as previously stated, aids in amino acid function. Amino acids are the building blocks of all proteins and an important component of breast-milk. The following are the results of a study published in *The American Journal of Obstetrics and Disease of Women and Children*:

"It has been shown that the feeding of desiccated placenta to women during the first eleven days after parturition causes an increase in the protein and lactose percent of the milk... All the mothers were receiving the same diet, and to the second set 0.6mg of desiccated placenta was fed three times a day throughout the period. Certain definite differences in the progress of growth of the two sets of infants are to be observed. It is evident that the recovery from the postnatal decline in weight is hastened by the consumption of milk produced under the influence of maternally ingested placenta." McNeile, Lyle G.

1918. The American journal of obstetrics and diseases of women and children, 77. W.A. Townsend & Adams, original press: University of Michigan.

Along with prolactin, oxytocin is beneficial to the new mother in yet another amazing way. This time, oxytocin is used in breasts to cause the smooth muscles around mammary cells to contract and eject milk.

All of these factors play an amazing role in the amount and quality of the nurturing and life-giving milk that a mother is able to offer her baby(ies)!