

### **General Guidelines for Postpartum Self-Care:**

- 1) **Make a plan to stay active during pregnancy and postpartum.** What has worked for you in the past to stay active? Would it make sense to put a gym membership (with childcare) on your baby registry? Or would you rather find someone to walk with outdoors?
- 2) **Surround yourself with support.** If you don't have a good network of friends who are parents, now is the time to make them. Joining a parenting group, attending a breastfeeding support group, attending birthing classes or joining a church/fellowship can all be ways of making new friends.
- 3) **Improve your primary relationship.** All couples can benefit from some relationship coaching. Improving your relationship now, and talking through your expectations and fears about parenthood, can make you a stronger couple as you enter this big transition.
- 4) **Reduce life stressors.** As best you can, work to get your stress level down before the baby comes. Say "no" to new commitments. Spend down your debts.
- 5) **Take more time to relax.** Go for walks. Get a massage. Try yoga or meditation.
- 6) **Journal your thoughts.** Pregnancy can be a time filled with excitement but also with worries and uncertainty. Writing down your thoughts gives you more perspective. Notice if you are thinking in extremes, being self-critical or expecting the worst.
- 7) **Prepare for breastfeeding.** There is some evidence that breastfeeding can be preventative to perinatal mood issues. However, most American women don't have much knowledge of, or experience with, breastfeeding. If breastfeeding is part of your plan, attending a breastfeeding support group (like La Leche League) during pregnancy can help prepare you to get your breastfeeding relationship off to a great start.
- 8) **Hire a doula.** Having a doula during pregnancy, birth and postpartum improves your chances of having a healthy birth and of getting your mothering relationship off to a great start.
- 9) **Embrace change.** You may have counted on keeping your life orderly and in control. Finding ways to open yourself to the possibility of life being a bit messy and topsy-turvy. Do readings, meditate or ask a trusted mentor for guidance about opening yourself to change and releasing your need for control.

For those with elevated risk for postpartum mood issues, these extra steps may be helpful.

- 1) **Find a therapist before you need one:** A therapist can help you work through past trauma and abuse, your fears about parenthood and help you make a plan to address perinatal issues. Having a therapist before you give birth makes it more likely you will get help before your symptoms become severe.
- 2) **Make a plan for meds.** If you've taken medication before, or if you feel that you are at high risk for perinatal depression or anxiety, talk to a psychiatrist about what medications might be acceptable for you to use during pregnancy and breastfeeding. You can also call the Infant Risk Center at Texas Tech (806.352.2519) to ask about medications you've taken in the past. Even if medications aren't your first choice, having a back-up plan is useful so that you know you have something to fall back on if your symptoms begin to interfere with life.