

# PRACTICAL HINTS for healing the Mother Within

Heather Bruce

*Regardless of what did/should/could have happened at the end of pregnancy/birthing /whenever, a good place for healing is to start nurturing from the foundation up.*

Even if for whatever reason breastfeeding is not going to happen, or can't, birthing still takes it out of a woman. Whilst Chinese women were and still are fed chicken broth with plenty of Dang Gui, and other blood building herbs (blood tonics aid emotional and mental, sleeping and especially lactation after birth), we in our culture seem pretty laissez faire about the whole deal.

It could be easy to forget that Mum, making food for another, requires not only the extra hydration, but the raw and good quality ingredients, PLUS the extra energy to drive the milk production factory.

Seen naturopathically, stress – even outrageously wonderful ones eagerly awaited, such as greeting new baby – create drains on our systems. At these times, more of various nutrients are used, and if not in a plentiful supply beforehand, this extra drain can swing mum into a deficit, where she is then experiencing all manner of apparently 'normal' post natal issues, such as 'baby blues', mastitis, weepiness, exhaustion with inability to sleep, and hair falling out. These may also be expected, and even written about as what happens.



## Being Self Responsible



After birthing, the body is in a looser state, until well after breastfeeding ceases. If lactation is not established, there is still a period of a few months when readjustments are still happening within mum's body, even if ovulation and menstruation start up again almost immediately. As most think they are looking after themselves when they are

having a little nap in the middle of the day, and are taking possibly a vitamin tablet, it is time to take another look at mum's body needs.

Seen in acupuncture terms, all structures in the body are supported by the Spleen yang energy. This means that anything that upsets the Spleen yang interferes with the integrity of all tissues in mum's body, as the energy of the Spleen yang holds all tissues, organs and blood in place.

Without getting more technical (go to Heather's book "*What Dads Can Do*" how this affects life and what you can do to support and remedy issues here), be aware that many common living choices and medical practices do not support this crucial aspect of self.

General yang in the body keeps the metabolism, circulation of everything, protection against all levels of invasion, and temperature regulation within normal levels. It also provides the feeling and desire for sexual expression, and allows the correct nutrient production and nourishing of all aspects of self.

Spleen energy specifically handles everything pertaining to the digestive abilities; it governs flesh through the

### Cold invasion happens when we:

do not wear shoes on a cool flooring surface,

choose cold water or foods in preference to warm/body temperature nourishment (that take much less out of us to digest)

sleep in a draught (pleasant though it may feel at the time)

circulation of raw materials to nourish it; governs blood and its integrity within the vessels; and to a very large extent, keeps us sane and structurally together whilst on the planet.

What distresses the general yang of the body is any **cold invasion**. A one-off attack of cold at any stage during the very vulnerable birthing period – such as ice compresses on perineum (allowing a major insult going directly into the inner reaches of a woman to *directly* interfere with all future uterine activities, sexuality, continence, digestion and temperature regulation) or on the swollen breasts, sucking ice in labour or being in a (welcome at the time) draught can reset major inner balances, creating life long health issues.

The Spleen energy is insulted by:

- " eating irregularly,
- " eating chilled/cold/raw foods and liquids
- " sweet anything's,
- " greasy substances,
- " and by leaving large gaps between taking in sustenance.

Trying to loose weight is a classic way to wreck havoc on a repairing body. An imbalanced Spleen energy is also likely to create obsessive thinking when out of balance.

These issues in themselves are often taken as normal consequences of birthing and mothering, rather than us paying attention to the observations of cultures more tuned in, and respectful than our own. We could ensure mum is well and her body needs respected on all levels. If we did listen, we would not allow the usual post natal shenanigans to occur.

## Healing After Birth



A very practical Chinese herbalist I trained with observed that the times when a woman was very vulnerable were four fold in her life –

Puberty  
Onset of sexuality  
Pregnancy  
Menopause

At these times, major 'hormonal' changes are occurring. These shifts then create periods of instability, where new 'normal ranges' of everything can be set in motion. This means that when pregnant and in the months afterwards, if we *really* tend to our own needs, we can become a lot stronger constitutionally than we were before. Or the opposite, leading to difficulties for all future living in this body.

This has *major* repercussions, as we, following the medical lead, tend to focus on the lowest common denominator – the players come out alive. We could raise our bar, and look to stunningly happy and well members of the team being **BETTER** than they were before conception, and use this as a goal, rather than possible litigation around obvious mortal birthing injuries.

If we did this, the horror some live through, with screaming distressed and shocked babies, fraught dads trying to keep mum (who is not herself, but another woman now), together would not have to happen.



### Practical hints to help heal after birth

*Cold has no place in any aspect of Mum's life..*

No Chinese mother would allow her newly birthed daughter to even have a bath for a month afterwards – cold invasion is the key aspect of post natal health dramas.

*Mum should eat small, very regular, highly nourishing snacks, very often.*

She should not wait for meals. She is in 'jersey cow mode', and needs to realise that protein, water, Vitamin B and rest are all the ingredients to rebuild good quality blood energy, which in turn makes the milk baby needs. The blood energy also nourishes mum's sanity, ability to cope and sleep and keep her hair on her head, her body well and lustrous and everyone around her happy.

*Mum should not lift anything heavier than baby for the first six weeks.*

This is especially the banning of lifting baby in the baby capsule, as its angle AND weight stresses the loose ligaments she has.

*Shock and anything disturbing Mum needs correcting as close to when it happened as possible.*

Shock energy left in the body festers along with the resentment and bitterness that is fostered by the constant revisiting of what 'should' and didn't happen. This leads to all manner of blood/sanity issues – and are easily remedied *outside* the medical framework – even Rescue remedy dropped in all drinking water can help antidote the trauma that may be still echoing through her being.

## (1) REST: Your body has to remake itself.

After birth, if you feel stunning, and so are up doing onto everyone and everything, you have missed a huge opportunity. In times past, women were EXPECTED to be waited on, if finances allowed. Mum came in from wherever – to mother her daughter, and to be there for her grandchildren.

If birthing in hospital – it was called ‘a home’ (away from home) and was often the only rest women ever had. Staying two weeks was usual – to bond, get routines established, and generally recover, as there was no stopping once going back to her own home. I remember as a three year old, being farmed out to an elderly aunt, so mum could have this time with my sister. Mum went off again and stayed ‘in the home’ when the next was born, and we had female relations in whilst she was away (dads all still worked – this was ‘women’s business’).

If at home, all knew that visiting new mum was off limits, as the

intimacy of the new family needed to be respected. Cooking meals and dropping them off, whizzing in and doing the washing, taking the older kids away so mum can sleep... all far more valuable than baby showers and gifts from the shops.

What happened to it being an automatic time women pulled together? We may like our privacy, our peace and our sanctuary – but the costs are more than one woman can muster – unless home help is on tap.

Rest is not just about sleeping. *Rest is for regeneration.* On all levels. Rebuilding and well. Calm and peace. Time for reflection, for getting in touch with self. If you have been one of those woman who needed to get everything done, and worked in one way or another up until the birth – the concept of ‘down time’ may be really scary. For whatever reasons you shied away from it before, it will still be confronting now. And the inner changes that would have prepared you for ‘baby time’ may

still not have been done.

*Rest is also about getting in touch with BEING not DOING.*

As our culture values things and ‘results’ it may be an inner battle/stretch to be ‘unproductive’. Remember that rearing a heart connected person from the outset is a labour of love, not one of paying mortgages and getting degrees completed.



## (2) WATER: To recover from pregnancy, the body needs to remake itself.

A major sort through and clean out is in progress, without your awareness. At least make enough *pure room temperature water* available for the flushing through of ‘leftovers’. Water is water. Not herbal teas, not fruit juice. Water is water. The others are extras.

To breast feed, very large quantities need to go through the system.

## Foods to Avoid

**Oranges** are *not* full of Vitamin C and should be avoided, as they create heat in the liver.

**Coffee**, besides being a great source of the irritant and stimulant (do we want a quiet, peaceful baby or not?) is also very heating in nature, and requires far more water than mum is drinking to flush out its effects. Normal tea is mildly diuretic, meaning that mum will be losing precious water, rather than having her body’s thirst quenched.

**Gluten** – found in all wheat rye, oats and barley products is a great way to create ongoing health issues. It is the corner stone of our culture’s eating code. Breads, sandwiches, cakes, biscuits and pastas are all very quick and easy and readily available. They fill mum up, and they DO NOT create harmonious good quality breast milk. Break your fast on protein and veggies – leftovers from last meal, with eggs added is perfect.

Most of us are slightly allergic or at least sensitive to gluten and avoiding it means that baby gets to experience easy food sources. Non gluten meals require more planning than just filling up, but the cost in baby distress – colic, reflux, projectile vomiting, unsettledness, screaming, ‘catching’ infections, having ongoing mucous and skin/breathing problems is hardly worth it.

## Ideas for protein snacks

*Protein snacks are easy as:*

a lightly boiled egg,  
a can of fish or avocado on a rice cracker  
a piece of chicken  
half a capsicum filled with cottage cheese  
ricotta on corn thins with slice of smoked salmon  
a piece of cheese  
cashew or other nut (*not peanut*) paste on rice crackers  
or in the celery stick groove

*All these are very easy and nutritious, and make a better alternative to other convenience snack foods.*

*Never start feeding with less than three glasses by your side.*

Don't take a bottle to drink from, as it is a lot quicker downed in a glass or cup. You will find that the first one may not even hit the sides when it is there as a visual prompt. Most do not hydrate themselves properly BEFORE pregnancy, so doing twice as much as when pregnant is a good start. The worst thing that will happen is you may have too much milk – see article in next issue.



### **(3)FOOD: for rebuilding and refuelling**

Often it is easier to let go the usual mind set, and look at eating as a rebuilding and refueling exercise. Not a taste, habit and comfort stop. After birth, there is substantial repair and rebuilding to happen within mum's being, on all levels. Whether Mum is lactating or not, her body has to recover its prior resilience to return to its normal shape and physiology. Most of this happens gradually and is ignored in the general newness of baby's presence.

The inability to plan, see clearly, still; have a memory, think, remember what you went into that room to get, be lucid, not snap partner's head off, sleep peacefully and when you can fit it in, and generally stay human, may be as easy as making sure good quality NUTRITIONAL food and supplements is always on hand.

### **Protein**

Everything that builds baby passes through mum's lips first. Rebuilding blocks for our bodies are separate amino acids that are called collectively 'protein'. The easiest source for our bodies to break down is from an animal source. Often it is too hard especially if being a vegan, or tending that way, to continue with these rules for eating when the extra baby rearing load is added in.

Choosing protein with every snack, and having snacks no more than three hours apart is a priority.

*Eating very frequently means that the blood sugar levels do not fluctuate wildly.*

This allows mood swings, energy

roller coasters and thus coping with whatever is happening in life to be easily dealt with. To achieve this, the easiest thing is to cook extra and have at least another serving of whatever in the fridge for easy reheating, so meals are always there for mum. Mum's breakfast is baby's tea!

If she chooses highly allergenic and easy foods (all cereals, breads and orange juice/coffee), baby is assured a colicky existence. Especially at the time when baby's body is least able to process it – our digestive and metabolic energy wanes with the sun, and none of us have as strong a digestion in late afternoon onwards.

Handfuls of mixed nuts (*no peanuts*), especially almonds, with every banana, or snack – especially to boost the protein quotient of treats others may have made for you.

### **Vegetables**

By eating at least two and a half cups of veggies daily (without counting in the potato amount), and having them as fresh as possible and a large helping of COLOUR each time (especially dark green and orange/red) and NOT microwaving them, this will allow a good variety into your diet.

Using a wok is the easiest method of getting plenty of leftovers, without all the pits and pans to clean up. Juicers are invaluable, if greens aren't your strong point. As a snack, later on in the day, this could be a great gift when someone is visiting and wondering what they can do for you.

### **Clearing Out All Non Nutrient Substances.**

SUGAR, chocolate, lollies, even honey, if it is going to be missed. If you have a 'sweet tooth', this is a manifestation of your body's imbalances. By eating a little,

often, loading up on protein and veggies, and taking the supplements below – especially Zinc, you will have a radical shift in the performance of your ‘engine’, as the fuel source dictates to a large degree, the way you travel through your life.

A large amount of baby troubles are the responses to the fuel that has been pumped into its body. (In utero as part of its nourishment, and then with the breast milk). All sources of caffeine, preservatives, flavorings and other taste and thus market enhancers are to be avoided. So too, the self medications mum may reach for – hopefully these have been removed well before conception. Cigarettes, alcohol and recreational drugs have no place in a growing baby’s life.

Bub’s brain is developing at a phenomenal rate, and respect for the being that is still being created will pay huge dividends later in toddler and childhood and beyond.

When mum is feeling ‘stressed’ and needing whatever comfort that normally has been chosen, it is time to really look at ‘why?’ rather than masking its existence. Look to the inner effects that accumulate for baby – ‘health’ is not about luck, but about good starts, and loving consistency.



#### (4) SUPPLEMENTS

##### Zinc

Unless we are spending a large chunk of our lives actively growing our food biodynamically, I suspect we could all do with supplementing, especially when under a greater than usual load. Zinc may be seen as a micronutrient, yet it is essential for RNA and DNA production and function. Genetic material is reproduced and repaired, growth and repair of every tissue in the body is dependent on Zinc’s

presence in enzymatic activities, and all digestive processes require Zinc’s presence.

*Pregnant women* need to ingest more Zinc and more again when lactating. Colostrum is very high in Zinc – where is it coming from if Mum hasn’t enough? How would Mum know? She may have the signs - stretch marks, allergies, mucous membrane troubles, digestive issues, emotional stuff going on, poor skin and hair, poor wound healing, and feel generally *not* the bloom of health she thought that she would. Zinc deficiency is implicated is also in prematurity.

*Lactating women* who are having mastitis, depression, energy and mood swings, who don’t feel like eating, and who can’t seem to fire up to be mum – may just need Zinc. If their babies have colic, allergies, infections, failure to thrive, are small for dates/age and who are unhappy little beings – again – Zinc to the rescue.

If these babies grow up to be very picky eaters, fussy with all food, even sometimes the breast, and who are always with a runny nose, grumpy and difficult – Zinc again. The cute hairless look – the wispy, fine, maybe now bald, was born with a full head of hair – think Zinc deficiency. Tooth problems – early cavities/actually crumbling teeth – Zinc.

Why do we not hear more about it? Sounds more important than Iron really. At least Iron deficiency doesn’t cause anencephaly (lack of brain development) as Zinc deficiency does.

Often Mum’s tiredness which is attributed to a low iron count is actually the tiredness from low Zinc and the body’s inability to absorb that which is being eaten – iron rich foods included.

##### Vitamin B

The vitamin for emotional and

## FAVOURITE JUICE RECIPE

A very quick and easy way of getting some colour into your belly.

*Half a red capsicum*

*One carrot*

*Half stick of celery*

*Bunch of greens*

*One whole lemon, (including the skin)*

*Some parsley*

*Little piece of ginger*

*Several apples*

Juice all together and drink immediately.

mental repair and health. You can read elsewhere of the virtues of this – just be aware that supplementing with folic acid, as medicos direct is very bad medicine, as all the B’s need to be present for you to use them – as little like amino acids and incomplete proteins – I’ll touch on this later.

If you did this, please go and get a complex and start taking half of one often. Taking folic acid often for months or years, hoping pregnancy will eventuate is foolish, as folic acid is very hard to miss in a well balanced, green leafy veggie full, egg and whole grain diet.

B and C are water soluble, meaning they are not retained in the body – hence a little of both often is a great way to assist yourself when under a load, as sleeping bursts and creating a whole food source for another is. Vitamin B is found in a wide variety of very commonly eaten foods - in whole grains and nuts, egg yolks, liver to name a few.

Taking a little often as a supplement when breastfeeding

will be guaranteed to lighten your mood/day and outlook. This and Zinc are specifics when wanting to get on top of a tendency to go under. Rather than waiting to see if post natal depression happens again – why don't you insure yourself and family against it?

### Vitamin C

Besides being very necessary for collagen repair – hence tissue elasticity and resilience, Vitamin C is essential to allow liver detoxification, gut absorption and general wellbeing. Contrary to popular belief, there is VERY little Vitamin C to be found in oranges. These and their juice I would suggest you avoid, as they energetically heat the liver – which in all of us is overworked anyway.

Vitamin C is found in red capsicum, guavas, various greens and red vegetables and fruit, and oysters. We are one of the few mammals unable to synthesize this ourselves. When under any stress – and just being in this century is sufficient – we need much more.

A lot of the commonly thought of

degenerative diseases are just Vitamin C deficiency – if your parents/relations are taking Cartia – suggest that they do some research on Vitamin C – taking mega doses reverses the arteriosclerosis that is supposed to be behind heart attacks.

Vitamin C taken in conjunction with all of these others should ensure mastitis does not happen. Part of the mastitis issue is a simple matter of being 'pissed off' and not letting it out – wrong sex, wrong birth, wrong life – all mounts up.

### Magnesium

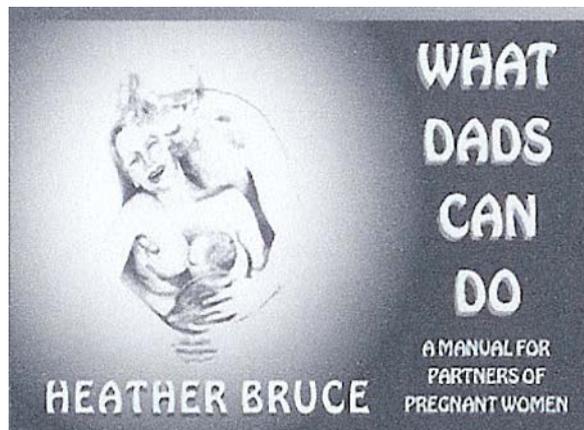
An essential for calming – especially spasms, tension and mood swings. Often the painful or troubling Braxton Hicks contractions that keep some of us awake are just Magnesium deficiency – very easily remedied, so you sleep better, allowing baby and self to rest and regenerate. Similarly, aches and pains, ligament stretching and tendon trouble may just be your body demanding more nutrients.

Numbness and tingling in fingers in pregnancy and possibly carpal tunnel are often a simple case of all of these nutrients being needed in greater amounts.

Whilst you may think natural is about *not* taking supplements, it is a very easy insurance against all the myriad non essential hassles that you may now be attempting to remedy. Most of these, if not all may well be nutritional in nature, thus easier to correct outside a behavioral approach.

A closing thought. . . . *looking after self is often just as easy as saying 'No' and meaning it* . It is also as easy as saying "yes" – to rest, to *doing* less, to *being* more. . . .

**Heather Bruce**, an acupuncturist and naturopath has left her previous Brisbane Well Mother and Baby clinic to write in the backwaters of her native New Zealand. She has begun her publications with "What Dads Can Do – a manual for partners of pregnant women". She will soon also have "Well Woman's Baby – Birthing the Mother Witbin" written and out in the New Year. You can visit her website [www.heatherbrucebooks.com.au](http://www.heatherbrucebooks.com.au).



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