

Southern Birthing Traditions

Mama Edna

Mama Edna is a beautiful Southern Bell born in the deep south in 1974. She birthed 5 children. Her mom was born in 1940 and birthed 4 children, and her grandmother was born in 1921 and birthed 9 children.

When Mama Edna had her children she personally felt “recovered” after 8-weeks however my grandmother assured me it takes a woman body to totally heal “close up” no less than 3-months. Mama Edna explains how she was treated by her family members after just giving birth. My family is very rooted in traditions of things women should do or not do after birth. My mother & family was there right before birth and made sure I had continued support 3 months after having birth. The traditions we follow are:

- Not long after giving birth my mother came in with ACE bandage wraps to bind my breast down so when my milk “came in” I would not become engorged.
- Wrap your stomach up with firm girdle or bandage to keep from getting the pouch & to aide in uterus going back into position.
- The baby nor I could not go outside for 3 months unless to doctors’ appointments.
- Everyone had to wash their hands and put a baby blanket on themselves before holding baby, the baby could not meet the person’s personal clothing.
- No children/teenagers allowed to hold baby until after 4 months
- No sex for 3 months
- Mother/sister stayed to help with baby, cooking, cleaning for at least 3 months. (I was never left to handle everything on my own while healing)

Mama Edna explained how our southern traditions are going by the wayside. Today there is no set time aside for the new moms to properly heal or bond with baby. Everyone is in their own world and the “sisterhood” that surrounded me, and my set aside healing time is gone. Sadly, I believe that is why more new moms go into depression. I totally agree. She also stated when my mom had her children she pretty much did everything I mentioned earlier that was done for me plus as a little girl I remember my 5 Aunts making a schedule of who was going to clean, cook or stay the night at the home of the Aunt that had just gave birth. My cousins and I would all be playing together, and the older ones would be helping around the house cleaning. Mama Edna explained why she couldn’t have any dislikes in her birthing traditions: The very first time my mother had my father drive her to Texas from Florida unannounced just showed up to our front door a week before my due date my husband and I was so irritated, but what could we say? NOTHING it was MOM. She stayed for 3 months and like clockwork my father came and picked her up. This occurred every single time we were pregnant.

Traditional Southern and Caribbean Postpartum Interview



By Yo'ela Israel



When our last son was born my mother had passed away when I was 5 months pregnant, so this was the first time my husband and I had to actually take care of everything on our own... & after the 3rd night of getting up with the newborn and actually not having any sleep, my husband broken down and said 'I miss your mother' I said me too... We discussed about how he wished she was irritating him by taking over the kitchen, and all the things she did differently than us, but at the end of the day all other pregnancies, we never knew how much she truly helped both of us stay sane while adjusting to new baby. So, I learned a hard lesson "I love my fore-mothers' postpartum traditions" & plan on continuing it with my daughters. Our birthing methods, I would first say my mother and grandmother was carrying out postpartum tradition as cultural. These are things that had been passed down for generations. They could not pinpoint why or explain where it came from. I use to think it was old wise tales about body not totally healed for 3 months, however many years later I found out in the bible (Leviticus 12:5) almost gives the same amount of time for a woman to recover after birth. So, my answer today is they are all three religious, cultural and practical they cannot be separated.

Haitian Birthing Traditions

Mama Orly

In Haiti I had my child in the hospital but regularly the women in my country deliver their babies by way of a midwife at home. In the hospital, once the baby is born, we took a cold shower, not sure why but that's what they did. We spent approximately 3 days in the hospital after my children was born. I had visitors, but the real work doesn't start until I get home.

Once we are home, the women in my family come to my aide. Everyone already knows what to do and what to bring Mama Orly said. First, we tied our hair and neck with a scarf to stay warm and sweat. Our pores are open and this way we prevented a cold or infection. For the baby, we tied a cloth around the baby stomach, we boil castor oil leaves, orange leave and gave the baby a little of the herbs to also prevent infection. We also give the baby castor oil to clean meconium. By this time, we started breast feeding and normally we breast feed until 2-3 years, however, I didn't breastfeed my children Mama Orly states.



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Traditions we followed was that we made a drink we drank for 3 days certain herbs for 3 days. She says it's a piece of the tree. Mango, avocado and papaya leave, after its boiled for a period, we do not refrigerate, we leave it out for the next day to drink. This concoction cleans the inside of you and release the blood left over in the body from giving birth. We drink this instead of water she explains. The women in my family use the same leaves or herbs to boil and take bath with. If you had a c section, you cannot take bath until your healed. My mother and aunts also massage my body with the leaves. Castor oil leaves as well, all these things are done because when you have a baby all your muscles are being used so this is to prevent soreness. My mother did these traditions as well as midwives even 3 days after you had the baby. What you all call yoni steaming today, we also steamed for centuries which we call Tebaum. The only thing I didn't like about my family's birthing tradition is that I didn't like the Tebaum yoni steam because it made me "dance" because it was so hot. This method helps to dry up the blood from birthing as well. I had to be covered from head to toe Mama Orly chuckled as she conveyed.

Mama Orly went on to explain the state of her country's birthing conditions. "Unfortunately, the people in Haiti are not doing the same things because of the tv. Once the women have children, they go outside wide open with their newborns, there pores are still open, and a lot of women are not using midwives or healing themselves with herb. They usually catch an infection or have complications. When my mom had me, her mom did even more when she was born. There meals were very restricted. Family will make soups to build blood to bring in the breastmilk and she took more types of baths".

This is my culture but there was meaning behind everything, she wishes we would go back to these traditions because women will not reap the benefits of what we did.

Mama Orly witnessed her niece giving birth and caught the baby in her hands. She cleaned the baby with soft towels the next day boil the orange leaves and cleaned the baby with the orange water. And pretty much followed the same traditions as her foremothers did. For more information about traditional postpartum methods please contact us a cocoafresh.com

(These interviews were given by Yo'ela Israel with 2 elder sisters in the nation of Israel)