

FAQ

Evidence-based answers to frequently asked questions on eating placenta (placentophagy)

Q: I hear people say eating placenta increases milk supply. Why does PlacentaRisks.org say it lowers milk supply?

A: There is no evidence for placenta ingestion increasing milk supply. Placenta encapsulation advertising promotes this idea, but many lactation consultants are seeing a lowering of milk supply as a direct effect of placenta ingestion. Some women who feel they have a great milk supply following placenta consumption, in fact, have babies with red flag feeding patterns and very poor weight gain. Placenta contains the hormones that can suppress milk supply.

Q: Doesn't our body need the hormones we lose when we deliver the placenta to prevent the "baby blues"?

A: Our bodies are designed to complete the natural hormonal cycle of childbirth into the postpartum time without any interference. The pregnancy hormones are not meant to be in our body after the birth, and in fact, they interfere with the lactation hormones needed at that time. The "baby blues" are due to a natural transitioning of hormones and are not meant to be prevented. The "baby blues" are not postpartum depression.

Q: I ate my placenta and I had so much energy, so I feel this prevented me from having postpartum depression (PPD).

A: The unnaturally high energy that placenta pills may give women does not mean it is preventing postpartum depression. Research studies have shown that placenta pills do not prevent PPD. A World Health Organization report found a number of social risk factors that contributed to PPD, not biological or hormonal factors.

Q: Haven't humans been eating their placenta for thousands of years, and we have just gotten out of touch with this postpartum practice?

A: It has never been a human practice for postpartum women to eat their placenta. Extensive anthropological research has found that there are no cultural practices at any point in time that involved women consuming their placenta (placentophagy). Cultural practices involve ceremonial disposal of the placenta. Maternal placentophagy is a new trend.

Q: Animals eat their placentas and they don't have any problems with milk supply, so why can't humans?

A: Animals have evolved to eat their placenta instantly and completely at birth. Humans have not evolved to do so, nor have humans evolved to eat their placenta over a period of days and weeks. Continuous consumption of these pregnancy hormones through ongoing ingestion of the placenta may cause low milk supply.

Q: Placenta is a part of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), so how can there be anything harmful about it?

A: According to scholarly review of the ancient Chinese texts, TCM actually does not include postpartum women consuming their placentas. Despite the claims that placenta pills are prepared by the "TCM method," placenta use is contraindicated for the postpartum time according to TCM principals.

Q: I heard that eating placenta is safe and the infection risk is not really an issue.

A: A 2018 research study shows high levels of bacteria in raw and raw-dehydrated placenta. Another 2018 study shows that nearly half of the women who are eating placenta pills have them prepared by the raw-dehydrated method. There is no preparation method that shows a complete elimination of bacterial levels in the placenta pills. Limitations in reporting outcomes of this new practice make it difficult to know the frequency of infection cases. Maternal consumption of placenta pills exposes newborns to a known infection risk.

To learn more visit PlacentaRisks.org an evidence-based website brought to you
by the Sonoma County Breastfeeding Coalition.

Sonoma County Breastfeeding Coalition Mission Statement:

"To educate and empower women to breastfeed; to encourage breastfeeding-friendly attitudes, policies, and images in the community; to promote unity among breastfeeding professionals and advocates; and to increase public awareness of the value of breastfeeding."