

Should You Eat Your Placenta?

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Would I eat my placenta? I know it is a weird question, but it has been on my mind for the past month, and I have had the opportunity to dig and learn more about the conversion topic. I found this topic via a social media app called TikTok from women that have eaten their placenta. I am a woman who wants to have children in the future. The term for consuming one's placenta is called placentophagy; a term used extensively in the essay, so get familiar with it. I know that many people think that this topic is gross and unthinkable. To those people, I say yes, it is kind of gross; it's a natural thing, but please keep an open mind when reading the essay. Other mammals eat their placentas, so why shouldn't we do it? Doctors and mothers argue that it is unsafe to consume because it has lots of unhealthy toxins in the placenta, but that is only if you eat it raw. Some doctors say there are no real benefits of placentophagy, but we should listen to mothers who have eaten their placenta. The overall argument for why you should not eat your placenta is that the doctors find no objective evidence or benefits. With that being said, we need to look at the women participating in placentophagy and their experiences. Andrew Fowler is a doctor who has no problem with placentophagy and says that there is no real threat to it. Throughout my research, I've found that placentophagy helps with postpartum depression, increasing milk supplies, having more energy, and less postpartum bleeding.

What is a placenta? The placenta is the afterbirth when having a child. The Mayo team is full of doctors like gynecologists, and *Wooster Community Hospital Health System* (2022) calls these doctors "specializes in caring for the reproductive health of a woman from the time she gets her first period all the way to post-menopause." Mayo Clinic (2022) article titled *Pregnancy Week by Week* said:

The placenta is an organ that develops in the uterus during pregnancy. This structure provides oxygen and nutrients to a growing baby. It also removes waste products from the baby's blood. The placenta attaches to the wall of the uterus, and the baby's umbilical cord arises from it.

The thing that stands out to me the most in this definition is when the Mayo team talks about the purpose of the placenta and its job. Earlier I mentioned that some women, but not many, eat their placenta raw. Most women eat it in a liquid form, like a smoothie, cooked, or in a pill form “...placenta encapsulation is like a postpartum vitamin that’s tailor-made for each individual woman,” (Moriarty, 2020). Again, I want to note that the research around this topic also seems incomplete, but many swear it works for them. The placenta needs to be dehydrated enough to kill the harmful pathogens but not cooked too long to kill the good minerals and nutrients. “... it’s destroyed by exposure to temperatures above 40°C. Human placentas are usually heated to around 70 °C during the encapsulation process. So it’s very unlikely placenta capsules retain any pain-relieving properties,” (McNeill, 2017). When the process of preparing the placenta is complete, no damaging pathogens are living, leaving valuable nutrients for the mother.

In addition, doctors and mothers say that placentophagy does not affect or prevent postpartum depression in any way. Laura and Kati are women and mothers that have deviated their lives to making health and wellness products for other mothers. On their website, they share woman’s health articles with evidence-based maternity. Their article called “Postpartum Anaemia Explained: Symptoms, Recovery, And Treatment” (2022) states, “your body doesn’t have enough iron to produce enough red blood cells and is the most common cause for anaemia in pregnancy and postpartum. It’s very common to suffer from an iron depletion after childbirth,” (Lola and Lykke Team, 2020). The article is saying that women postpartum suffer from iron

deficiency. An article called “Postpartum Depression. Healthy Mothers.” states that postpartum depression happens after a woman gives childbirth. They describe it as emotions of sadness and tiredness and lots of anxiety that last long after giving birth. In the article “Low Iron Depression and Anxiety” by Gerard Guillory, certified in Internal Medicine in simple terms, he passed a difficult knowledge test. He said that iron is needed to produce dopamine in the brain. When the brain has low dopamine levels, this results in depression and anxiety.

Skeptics of placentophagy say that a mother’s milk supplies will not increase and that the only way their supplies will grow is naturally. On October 10, 2018, Heather Meyer posted their article, “Does Placenta Encapsulation Increase Milk Supply?” In that article, Meyer says, “hormone that stimulates milk production and has anxiolytic and sedative effects, human placental lactogen could help improve postpartum well-being and be effective in case of insufficient lactation,” (Mayer, 2018). Heather has proven that placentophagy helps with milk supplies. Donna Walls, a registered nurse, has a bachelor’s in science in nursing, intra-capsular cataract extraction, lactation consultant, and overall advanced nurse lactation consultant. In her article, she talks about her experience as a lactation consultant. She helps mothers with breastfeeding their newborns. In her finding, she found a difference between women who ate their placentas and women who did not eat their placentas. The women who did not consume their placenta had trouble providing enough milk for their babies, and women that have eaten their placenta had a surfactant increase in milk supplies.

Women who practice placentophagy say they have more energy. You know now that postpartum mothers have low iron deficiencies and with that comes less energy. “Research shows fatigue to be a contributing factor for postpartum depression. By taking one’s own placenta, the increased iron stores can lead to having more energy,” (Woods, 2022). More energy

means more sleep; Danielle Pacheco proves this in her article *Sleep Satisfaction and Energy Levels* posted on April 29, 2022. “One of the prominent theories on sleep function posits that sleep serves to conserve and restore energy,” (Pacheco, 2022). The *Sleep Foundation* has fact-checked every article, but Dr. Anis Rehman, an Endocrinologist, checked this article. Pacheco proves that better sleep leads to more energy. If placentophagy is present in the mother, most mothers will have more sleep and more energy.

Is it possible that placentophagy will reduce postpartum bleeding and pain? Shannon Clark is a certified OBGYN (obstetrics and gynecology) and an MFM (maternal-fetal medicine). She gives advice and informs the internet via YouTube videos and answers questions about pregnancy and postpartum pregnancy. In one of those videos, the question of whether you should eat your placenta comes up; she answers with how a placenta is consumed and the pros and cons. One of the pros, she states, is that your body releases more oxytocin, reducing postpartum bleeding and decreasing the chances of uterine cancer. In an article called “Eating the Placenta: What Would Anyone Do It?” by Genevieve Howland (2021), she states that the placenta contains oxytocin, a hormone that reduces pain, therefore, giving the mother more energy.

All things considered, I hope you have learned that the placenta has beneficial hormones like iron that increase milk production, help postpartum depression and bleeding, and, overall, faster recovery from giving birth. Unfortunately, there are doctors that say there is no real benefit in placentophagy. In writing this essay, I have learned that I would consider eating my placenta because other trustworthy women have had beneficial experiences, and giving birth scares me, and this gives me some comfort. The big question is would you eat your placenta?

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