



# “I ate my own placenta.”

Yoga teacher and new mother **Cheryl Parsons** delves into the world of the afterbirth. From capsules and tinctures to raw placenta smoothies, find out why more and more women are choosing to use this amazing organ postpartum...





understanding: "Well, it makes sense," he said. "I mean, after all, we are one of the very few mammals on this earth that do not eat the placenta... just don't expect me to be trying any."

My intention is certainly not to put you off your cornflakes, but to show you just what an amazing organ the placenta is. For nine months it nurtures and protects a developing foetus, joining mother to baby via the vital umbilical cord. It floods a baby's body with blood, oxygen and nutrients, while secreting hormones to support a healthy pregnancy. However, when baby has finally arrived, for the most part in the Western world, the cord to its life support 'machine' is quickly severed even while it is still pumping, and the placenta is tossed away as medical waste. Robin Lims in his book, *Placenta - The forgotten Chakra*, calls it the "heroine of gestation" and a "miracle" that should be treated with respect, asking the question: "How did the placenta, central to our survival and future well-being, lose its significance and come to be considered garbage?"

Indeed in many cultures and religions, the placenta is regarded as highly sacred. Many Muslims bury the placenta under the Islamic belief that it is part of the human body. Eating the placenta or 'placentophagia' has been a common practice for centuries in China, where it is thought to increase milk supply and have anti-ageing properties. In some African nations, the placenta is wrapped and buried under a tree, while in Indonesia it is considered a baby's twin and guardian and must be buried in accordance with sacred traditions. In the animal world, many mammals eat the placenta to speed postpartum recovery and stem blood loss.

When I researched placenta use in Dubai prior to my birth I came across Elizabeth Bain, one of the few women in the UAE who carry out this delicate work. "I was always inspired by this lost tradition that was seemingly handed down from women to women within their villages and tribes," says Elizabeth. "Yet it wasn't until I trained as a birth doula (birth support partner) that I noticed again how many women were tired, hormonal,

It's not exactly dinner party conversation. While I did not whip up a placenta korma, I did effectively ingest my afterbirth in the form of capsules, after the birth of my first baby over six months ago. Now, I'm no tree hugging, tie-dye wearing hippie type, but when I heard about using the placenta postpartum during my pre-natal yoga teacher training, I knew it would one day become part of my birth plan.

Six months into my pregnancy I told my husband of my plans to get my placenta encapsulated - dried out, ground down and popped into pill form. Well accustomed to my sometimes weird and wonderful 'yogic' ideas, he was surprisingly

#### Benefits of ingesting the placenta are said to include:

- Increase milk supply and maternal energy
- Facilitate an easier postpartum recovery
- Replenish depleted iron levels and Vitamin B6
- Contains body's natural hormones
- Balances the system post birth
- Helps uterus return to pre-pregnancy state more quickly



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depressed, lacked energy and very anxious in the postnatal period. It was then I began to consider what would be of benefit to them to take in a natural, holistic form."

"After seeing midwives and doulas offering encapsulation, smoothies and tinctures as a means of natural healing, I began to extensively research the history and benefits. At the same time a doula client who had suffered from severe depression asked me to encapsulate her placenta," Elizabeth continued. "She was amazed (and so was I) at how good she felt, how balanced she felt after the birth, how she never felt tired and did not need any medication."

Elizabeth went on to set up her own services here in Dubai, Placenta Passions, after undergoing extensive training with Full Circle Placenta Encapsulation. The training is meticulous, covering how to prepare the placenta to a very high standard, along with a certification for food hygiene and working with blood-borne viruses. Besides offering the placenta in capsule form, she also makes raw placenta smoothies, something that she says is surprisingly popular in Dubai.

"The majority of women have a placenta smoothie that I make and then take to them in the hospital within a couple of hours of the birth. The rest of their placenta is then made into capsules and a tincture and I also offer placenta prints and cord keepsakes."

"The biggest feed back I receive is about energy levels, no matter if it is their first baby or their fifth, all my clients have reported a feeling of more energy, better or increased milk supply, quicker healing and surprisingly less hair fall," comments Elizabeth.

"Other major benefits of consuming the placenta can include guarding against postnatal depression, speeding postpartum recovery, decreasing after-pains and replenishing iron levels, as

well as re-balancing hormones such as oxytocin and CRH, which is a natural stress reliever."

Childbirth takes so much out of your body, depleting it of essential nutrients as well as creating a massive upheaval to hormonal levels. Personally, this was my first birth and while I have nothing to compare it to,

taking my placenta pills did give me the peace of mind that I was giving something back to myself. Although nothing can quite prepare you for the challenges of being a parent, it also helped me to feel I was getting the best, healthy start. While you may not remain convinced, I hope this given you some food for thought. 🌱

#### **Inka Resch gave birth to first son, Kai, in July...**

"I had heard that the placenta is a precious resource and was thrilled to learn that it could actually be encapsulated. Easing away from the hormone high of pregnancy and birth rather than having it just drop off sounded like a smart thing to do. I have to say that my post-birth experience was amazing. I was not tired despite the utter lack of sleep and I felt so happy for weeks and weeks afterwards. I don't know if I can attribute it completely to the placenta capsules, as I have nothing to compare it to, but I have heard from others who have experienced post-birth both with and without them and they noticed a huge difference in mood and energy levels."



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