

Information for Placenta Encapsulation Services

Robin Doolittle Illian, CPM

What is my Experience in Placenta Encapsulation?

I processed my first placenta in 2003 following the birth of my niece. I was amazed and moved by the experience—to be making medicine out of such a special organ. My sister felt that the capsules balanced and supported her throughout her postpartum time. From there, I was hooked.

I continued to offer placenta encapsulation services throughout my midwifery training, though in 2003-2005, it was not nearly as popular as it is today.

In 2005, after I became a Certified Professional Midwife, providing home birth service in Maine, I also began teaching at Birthwise Midwifery School. I proposed, designed and then taught an elective called, “Placenta Medicine,” which was a popular course—half didactic and half hands-on, to midwifery students. I taught that class twice a year for the next 8 years before I passed it on to another instructor.

Why would someone want to encapsulate their placenta?

Placenta has been used in Traditional Chinese Medicine for centuries. The practice of women using their own placentas for personal medicine following childbirth is fairly new, and not well-studied.

Animal research has shown that there are very real benefits for nonhuman mammals ingesting their placentas, especially when it comes to pain relief after labor and optimizing maternal–infant bonding (Apari & Rozsa, 2006; Kristal, 1980; Kristal et al., 2012). In addition, limited human research has shown some benefits, such as **improved infant weight gain, increased milk supply in some cases, and overall maternal satisfaction with the practice.**

Theoretical benefits based on hormones and women’s experiences of ingesting their placentas include:

Prevention of Postpartum Depression (PPD): Some theories of PPD consider the dramatic fall in placental hormones as a precursor to depression. Ingesting placenta may help mediate this rapid drop in placenta hormones by maintaining small amounts, thus “weaning” off them more gradually.

Prevention of baby blues: The placenta makes large levels of Corticotropin Releasing Hormone (CRH) that helps people cope with stress. Once the placenta is gone, it takes the body a little while to kick-start its own production and establish its normal feed-back loop. Women with lowest CRH levels have shown to be more depressed. ^{1,2}

¹ Chrousos, G.P., 1995. The hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal axis and immune-mediated inflammation. *N. Engl. J. Med.* 332, 1351–1362

² Kalantaridou, S.N. et al, 2004. “Stress and the Female Reproductive System,” *Journal of Reproductive Immunology* 62: p 61–68.

On a **nutritional** level alone, the placenta is a source of bio-available iron, and can be used as an **iron supplement** postpartum, which has positive effects on energy levels and mood.

Finally, traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) practitioners have prescribed placenta as a **health tonic, energy booster, and general restorative after childbirth**. According to TCM, placenta builds the body's *jing*, or source of kidney vitality. *Jing* is said to be responsible for one's vitality, resistance to disease, and longevity.

Please see my bibliography for more information and sources.

Are there any times it would NOT be recommended to encapsulate or take my placenta pills?

Yes, the following instances would be reasons for us to not encapsulate your placenta:

- Infection of the uterus or fetal membranes (called chorioamnionitis or intra-amniotic infection) that develops prior to or during labor would be a reason to not use your placenta as medicine.
- Health concerns with the baby that require your placenta to be investigated further by the hospital pathology lab. Please note that you may have (or ask to have) your placenta cultured instead of sent off to pathology. It is still possible to keep your placenta in this case.
- Blood borne pathogens such as Hepatitis B or C, syphilis, or HIV.

It is also important to know that the **capsules should not be taken during times of infection or illness, such as the common cold, flu, or mastitis**. Taking the capsules can make these conditions worsen. Once the infection is clear, capsules use can be continued.

Interested?

Please see my contract for details on my services and responsibilities to you, as well as price and details around getting your placenta.

Questions can be directed to Robin at midwiferobin@gmail.com or 207-233-6888.

Placenta Medicine Bibliography

Apari, P., & Rozsa, L. (2006). "Deal in the womb: Fetal opiates, parent offspring conflict, and the future of midwifery." *Medical Hypotheses*, 67 (5), 1189–1194.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.mehy.2006.03.053>

Baker, Melissa. "Placentophagia." *Natural Parenting*, Issue 11, Winter 2005.

Chrousos, G.P., 1995. The hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal axis and immune-mediated inflammation. *N. Engl. J. Med.* 332, 1351–1362.

Cole, Melissa, IBCLC. 2014, "Placenta Medicine as Galactagogue: Tradition or Trend?" *Clinical Lactation* 2014, 5(4), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1891/2158-0782.5.4.116>

Field, Mary. "Placentophagy." *Midwives Chronicle and Nursing Notes*, November 1984.

Frye, Anne. *Holistic Midwifery, Volume II*, Labrys Press: Portland, 2004.

"The Bridge of Life: Options for Placentas" by Kelly Graff *Midwifery Today* Issue 84, Winter 2008. (written by Birthwise grad)

Kristal, Mark B. "Placentophagia: A Biobehavioral Enigma." *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, Vol. 4, Summer 1980, pp. 141-150.

Kristal, Mark B. "Enhancement of Opioid Mediated Analgesia: A Solution to the Enigma of Placentophagia," *American Psychological Association*. 1987

Kristal, M. B., DiPirro, J. M., & Thompson, A. C. (2012). Placentophagia in humans and nonhuman mammals: Causes and consequences. *Ecology of Food and Nutrition*, 51 (3), 177–197. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03670244.2012.661325>

Kalantaridou, S.N. et al, 2004. "Stress and the Female Reproductive System," *Journal of Reproductive Immunology* 62: p 61–68.

"Medicinal Uses of Placenta." www.gentlebirth.org/archives/eatplcnt.html

Miller, Janneli. "Traditional Chinese Medicine Placenta Preparation," www.geocities.com/virtualbirth/placenta.html

Pitchford, Paul. *Healing with Whole Foods: Asian Traditions and Modern Nutrition*, 3rd Ed., North Atlantic Books: Berkeley, 2002. P. 362

Placenta Benefits website, www.placentabenefits.info, November 2011.

Placenta Apothecary, website. Research and Studies section, <http://placentaapothecary.com/placenta-research-studies/>, accessed October 2012.