

[M]OTHERBOARD RESOURCES

# THE FOURTH TRIMESTER



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birth preferences made simple



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Adapted from Katie Amodei, Parent Map, 2010

## ALL BABIES ARE BORN “A BIT TOO EARLY”

Humans birth their babies a bit on the “early” side when compared with other mammals. James McKenna, Ph.D., professor of anthropology at Notre Dame University, believes this is because when primitive women evolved to stand up on two legs, the shape of the female pelvis became narrower. This resulted in human babies being born three to four months earlier, before their heads grew too large to pass safely through the birth canal.

Many mammal babies can walk, even run when they’re born, but human babies are born with immature nervous systems. A human newborn’s brain is only about 25 percent of its adult weight at birth, while most other mammals are born having 60 percent to 90 percent of their adult brain size. This could be why babies can’t easily regulate their breathing, body temperature, and heart rate.

## YOUR BABY’S FOURTH TRIMESTER

“When babies are first born, they don’t have the brain maturity to deal with the outside world,” says Jennifer McArthur, co-director of the Northwest Association for Postpartum Support. “They depend on their parents for basic survival, but also for soothing, because they just don’t know how to soothe themselves until they are about 4 months old.”

Some experts say human babies need the first three months of life to give their brain and central nervous system the time needed to mature. This is called the **FOURTH TRIMESTER**.

## SOOTHING YOUR BABY

Harvey Karp, M.D., assistant professor of pediatrics at UCLA and author of *The Happiest Baby on the Block*, discovered that colic is basically nonexistent in several cultures around the world.



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“I studied the Kung San tribe of South Africa and discovered that their babies very rarely cry. Mothers soothe and calm their babies very quickly. They carry them all day long while walking miles a day,” says Karp. “They also nurse their babies 50 to 100 times a day, and sleep with their baby on top of them.”

Karp says the American approach of having a newborn sleep in a separate room from his parents does not work well for babies. Based on his research, Karp created a method that he says can reduce or eliminate, crying and colic symptoms in young babies.

“All infants are born with an ‘off’ switch for crying,” Karp explains. “Inside the uterus they get constant holding and rocking, and the noise in there actually is louder than a vacuum cleaner. Then suddenly they are born and it’s quiet and still. So the best way to activate a baby’s calming reflex is to emulate the movements and noises that babies experience inside the uterus. But you have to do it exactly right.”

### DR KARP’S “5 S’S”

- **SWADDLING:** Tight swaddling provides the continuous touching and support the fetus experienced while still in the womb.
- **SIDE OR STOMACH POSITION:** Karp recommends placing a baby on her left side to help with digestion, or on her stomach to provide reassuring support. Once the baby is sleeping peacefully, you can turn her onto her back, which experts say is the safest sleep position in preventing Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).
- **SHUSHING SOUNDS:** These sounds imitate the continual whooshing sound made by the blood flowing through arteries near the womb. Karp recommends parents run a vacuum cleaner or hair dryer a safe distance from the baby until she falls asleep, then leave a fan or another form of white noise on while she sleeps.
- **SWINGING:** Every movement mom made while baby was in utero created a swinging motion in the womb. Rocking, swinging movements, car rides and using an infant swing can all help soothe a baby.
- **SUCKING:** Sucking has its effects deep within the nervous system. It triggers the calming reflex and releases natural chemicals within the

brain. This can be accomplished by allowing the baby to suck on the breast, a bottle, a pacifier or even a finger.

## YOUR FOURTH TRIMESTER

The postpartum period also brings hormonal changes, stress, and sleep deprivation for you too. We need to take care of ourselves. Life after baby will never be the same, so we need to find compassion and grace accept our “new normal.”

### TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

- **SLEEP WHEN BABY SLEEPS:** Housework and responsibilities can wait. Being sleep deprived makes everything else in life next to impossible to manage.
- **INVITE USEFUL FRIENDS:** Some friends require more “hosting” than others. In the early days, stick to inviting friends and family over who will do something useful: Cook food, fold laundry, do dishes, clean up, entertain older children, walk the dog, etc.
- **LISTEN TO YOUR BODY:** Try not to push it with returning running around as usual. After birth, your bleeding is a good indicator as to whether or not you overdid it. If your bleeding starts back up again, you were probably on your feet too much and need to rest.
- **WATCH YOUR MOOD:** People usually know about postpartum depression, but many don’t know about other postpartum mood disorders including postpartum anxiety and postpartum OCD. If you feel like what you’re experiencing isn’t normal (or your partner or friends tell you they’re worried) make sure you see a mental health professional.
- **MAKE A PROMISE:** In many ways your life will never be the same. If this feels crushing to you pick one thing from your “former” life that you promise to return to after a year or two. Something that is an important part of who you are (painting, yoga, writing, etc.)
- **KNOW YOUR RIGHTS:** We know that staying home with baby is a



luxury many can't afford. Research what your rights are for paid leave and try to work out a plan in advance.

## FOURTH TRIMESTER RESOURCES

### Books/CDs/DVDs

[The Happiest Baby on the Block](#), by Harvey Karp, M.D.

[The Happiest Baby on the Block DVD](#) and [The Happiest Baby on the Block "Super-Soothing" Calming Sounds CD](#).

[The Fourth Trimester: And You Thought Labor Was Hard](#), by Amy Einhorn

[The Fourth Trimester](#), by Brenda Eheart

[Sleeping with Your Baby: A Parent's Guide](#), by James J. McKenna, Ph.D.

[The 7 Stages of Motherhood: Making the Most of Your Life as a Mom](#), by Ann Pleshette-Murphy

## TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE SWADDLING

Double-swaddling keeps a baby's arms and legs tightly wrapped. To do it, try:

- Swaddling with one receiving blanket, then another on top
- Swaddling once with a receiving blanket then putting the swaddled baby in an infant sleep sack
- Using a swaddling product such as SwaddleMe by Kiddopotamus

## Postpartum Support International Helpline

1-800-944-4773

#1 En Espanol or #2 English

OR TEXT: 503-894-9453



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**TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF**  
You can't fill others up from an empty cup.