



## Placenta for Healing

**Many people of the world** have known the secret power of the placenta as a medicinal supplement. Among the Chinese and Vietnamese, it is a customary practice to prepare the placenta for consumption by the mother. The placenta is thought to be rich in nutrients that the mother needs to recover more readily from childbirth. In Italy, women have been known to eat parts of the placenta to help with lactation. Hungarian women bite the placenta to expedite the completion of labor. And knowledgeable midwives in this country have their birth mothers take bites of raw placenta to help stop hemorrhaging, due to its beneficial oxytocin content.

**There are a variety of potential benefits** to placentophagy. For one, the placenta contains vitamins and minerals that may help fight depression symptoms, such as vitamin B6. For another, the placenta is considered rich in iron and protein, which would be useful to women recovering from childbirth, and a particular benefit to vegetarian women.

**Research on placentophagy** is still in its infancy, although there is a large body of research beginning to develop on postpartum hormone fluctuations and health. Researchers from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) conducted a study that focused on CRH (Corticotropin-Releasing Hormone). CRH is a stress reducer, and is generally produced by the hypothalamus. During the last trimester of pregnancy, the placenta secretes so much CRH that the levels in the bloodstream increase threefold. However, it was also discovered that postpartum women have lower than average levels of CRH, triggering depressive symptoms. They concluded that the placenta secreted so much CRH that the hypothalamus stopped producing it. Once the placenta was born, it took some time for the hypothalamus to get the signal that the CRH levels were low, and to begin producing it again. This is just another sign that there is likely a biological cause for the "baby blues", aka "Post Partum Depression" which is directly related to hormone levels.



**Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)** has been using placenta medicinally for thousands of years. One of the well-known TCM uses for placenta, or *Zî hé chē*, is to help with insufficient lactation. Interestingly enough, in 1954, researchers conducted a study on 210 women who were expected to have insufficient milk supply. They gave dried placenta to the women, and discovered that 86% of them had a positive increase in their milk production within a matter of days. It is exciting to see that some scientific research has validated TCM theories of the benefits of placenta. More recent research has discovered that placentophagia could enhance pain tolerance by increasing the opium-like substances activated during childbirth. This would obviously be beneficial during the postpartum healing process.

**In my personal experience**, women who have taken placenta capsules report positive results in an overwhelming number of cases. Some women have even reported feeling positive effects as quickly as the same afternoon of the day they began their first dose. Women who were already feeling "weepy", or experiencing other early signs of the baby blues, have felt better within days. Although the current scientific research is exciting, we have barely begun to scratch the surface of the potential benefits of placentophagy. Considering that placenta is a completely natural substance, created by a woman's own body, encapsulation of the placenta is definitely worth considering as part of a holistic postpartum recovery for every expectant woman.

### **Traditional Chinese Medicine**

Traditional Chinese Medicine Augments Qi (energy) and Xue (Blood) and Therefore, tonifies and builds Yang (the healthy heat in the body), Yin (the healthy fluids in our body + the body's cooling system) and Jing (Vital Essence/the original energy one is born with).



### **Brief Explanation From the Chinese Medical Perspective:**

All foods have properties that can benefit the body, depending on the body type and other factors. Placenta is considered to be a very powerful medicine as it is life giving and stores the vital essence for the baby. Placenta is often included in traditional medicinal combinations with restorative functions.

Generally, we cannot directly tonify or rebuild the vital essence, as it is over a process of years that this is built up. Firstly there is the Qi that comes from our diet/what we eat and from the oxygen we take in when we breathe. Some of this Qi is then turned into Xue (Blood) after digestion and stored in the Liver. If the body is producing enough Blood (via good health practices) it is then transported from the Liver to the Kidneys and Marrow (in TCM the Kidneys control the Bone Marrow) and becomes "Jing", aka, the vital essence of the body.

There are two types of Jing: pre-natal and post-natal.

Pre-natal Jing is the reason why pre-natal care is so important for future health. It comes from the sperm and ova during conception and cannot be replenished. Post-natal Jing can be replenished but it takes many years. Pregnancy is taxing on the body and can drain Qi (energy), Xue (Blood) and Jing (our body's vital essence) (in that order) even if the mother follows the best of health regimes.

### **More specifically, placenta pills may help to:**

- Increase general energy
- Allow a quicker return to health after birth
- Increase production of breast milk
- Decrease likelihood of baby blues and post natal depression
- Decrease likelihood of iron deficiency
- Decrease likelihood of insomnia or sleep disorders

The body is so individual and because of the powerful nature of this medicine other benefits are also likely but too numerous to mention. I believe that this practice is particularly beneficial to vegetarian mothers and those prone to post natal depression.



## **Other Considerations**

It is best to check with your midwife or health care professional to be sure that your placenta is healthy and able to be eaten. It may be best to just ask if it is healthy, depending on your relationship with your caregiver.

## **Contraindications**

Not to be used in heat conditions or for people with cold, flu-like symptoms or infections.