

Biology of Human Reproduction Reflection Essay #4

This Week's Topic: Placentophagia

Placentophagia after birth has long been practiced in China, and is becoming more popular in the United States. Read the attached article, think about the topic, and write a reflection. In case you're not sure what to write, some questions to think about include: How did this article make you feel? Is this something that you would ever consider (if you are male, how would you feel about your wife doing this)?

Once again, your reflection will be graded as follows:

| Points | Expectations |
|-------------------|--|
| 5 | Paper contains a thoughtful reflection of the assigned topic |
| 2 | Paper contains correct grammar and spelling |
| 2 | Paper is 1 page, typed, 12-point font, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins |
| 1 | Paper is e-mailed to me as a word-processed attachment. My email address is kriscode@fallriverschools.org |
| Total = 10 points | |

Note: If you do not have access to e-mail or even to a computer, please see me and we will make arrangements.

Due Dates: Red Section: Thursday, January 7th

Black Section: Friday, January 8th

Cannibalism Amongst United States Mothers

My Plans to Eat My Placenta

By Shauna Ann Walker

During the months of pregnancy with my son I became an information junkie—spending hours and hours daily cruising the internet for information on natural birth. Following the experience I'd had at the birth of my daughter in a common hospital setting I was absolutely terrified to birth in such an inhumane circumstance again. After doing months of research I had everything prepared for my natural birth. Homebirth not being an option at the time I had picked out a favorable birthcenter and found a great midwife. I was immensely well-informed about everything I could possibly find pertaining to birth and newborn care. Most days I felt so confident in my ability to give birth that I often considered dropping the midwife and birthcenter and just doing the delivery myself. I had entire note pads worth of information and as the birth was drawing nearer decided it was time to condense it all down into an easy to read birth plan. While searching through different birth plan formats I began to notice that there was something many of them had in common that I had not researched into. What was I going to do with the placenta? Having not even seen the placenta at my last delivery it had escaped my mind that it was my responsibility. I quickly threw myself back into research. That is when I stumbled across the increasingly popular practice of Placentophagia or eating the placenta.

Takeaways

- New information has unfolded surprising benefits from eating the placenta.
- The reasons why the placenta works as such a cure-all are very simple and obvious.
- I have also seen evidence for placental consumption in some European countries.

In Western cultures eating the placenta is often viewed as barbaric or cannibalistic, but new information has unfolded surprising benefits from eating the placenta. Due to the current information there has recently been a push among new mothers to eat the placenta after giving birth. Studies have shown that eating the placenta can restore nutrients lost by the mother during pregnancy and especially during the physically trying birth, increase the production of breastmilk, mire postpartum haemorrhage and aid with the all too common outbreaks of baby blues and postpartum depression. Despite the results of these studies and the claims of numerous women who have consumed their placentas and found it helpful many western doctors still discourage Placentophagia claiming that while it is not potentially harmful consuming the placenta carries no innate benefits for the mother.

The reasons why the placenta works as such a cure-all are very simple and obvious. In order for the placenta to function in the role it plays for the developing baby it is full of natural hormones. These hormones are very necessary in the development of the fetus and account for some of the interesting moods and behaviours experienced by pregnant women. These same hormones quickly vanish from the mother's body during the birth experience. The act of giving birth obviously takes a lot out of a woman: the baby, placenta, blood, guts, tears, hormones and loads of vitamins and minerals are all suddenly expelled from the mother's body in a relatively short period of time. The placenta, however, is loaded with nutrients including B vitamins and Iron—both important vitamins in preventing depression and aiding in recovery; because the placenta is the provider of nutrients for the baby all those months in the womb all of those nutrients are lost to the mother after the birthing of the placenta. Unless of course she eats it!

While the majority of people I have come across are abashed and often infuriated by the idea of Placentophagia, retorting with comments about how disgusting, barbaric or cannibalistic it is, from a historical and world-wide viewpoint consuming the placenta is really not that shocking or unheard of at all. In fact, many people all over the world and all through human history have known about the many benefits of placental consumption and numerous cultures throughout time have and still are using the placenta as a medicinal supplement. For example in China or Vietnam it is not uncommon to prepare the nutrient rich placenta for consumption by the mother. I have also seen evidence for placental consumption in some European countries. The giving of a piece of raw placenta to a woman who is haemorrhaging after the delivery of her baby is not that uncommon a method amongst midwives and is a proven technique to stop postpartum bleeding.

After reading through article after article and study after study it began to dawn on me what I was going to do with my placenta . . . eat it! When I presented this scenario to my husband he was supportive, but not inclined to have any himself. I searched out recipes for placenta lasagnes, placenta stews, placenta roasts and placenta tacos. I also found options for placenta tablets, placenta jerky, placenta shakes and placenta essence. I learned that the placenta must be kept in a freezer prior to consumption, that it must be eaten within a few days of bringing it home and most sources recommended washing and cooking thoroughly. I worried that my midwife may not feel the same about my desire to keep and consume my placenta. I found articles all over the Internet about women who had been denied access to their own placentas in the United States. I, however, was going to be giving birth in Germany. When I brought up the issue with my midwife she was not in the least bit shocked by the suggestion and actually went so far as to say it would save them money if I took it home because they would not have to dispose of it themselves. She then gave me a pamphlet and as it turned out in Germany a woman can mail in a portion of her placenta in a specially provided container and a medical facility would test it and then make homeopathic remedies out of it. This proposition had me jumping for joy and I quickly signed myself up although I

still planned to consume the remaining portion of the placenta. Things do not always turn out as we plan though!

In the days following the birth I was so caught up in my new baby that preparing myself some placenta stew never really entered my mind. My husband offered to prepare it for me at one point, but it just didn't seem that important and before we knew it the time for consuming the placenta had expired. Instead we planted the placenta under a cherry tree according to the rituals of other cultures I had read about. After a week or two my homeopathic placental medicines finally arrived. I have taken them to increase my breast milk supply during those extremely difficult times when the baby goes into a growth spurt and I use them almost daily to help with the down times and mood swings that so often accompany a woman after she has given birth. They really do seem to help! I still do plan, however, to do what is necessary to consume my placenta the next go around.

More resources

- <http://placentabenefits.info/>

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