

## Book Review

***Maternity Leave: A New Mother's Guide to the First Six Weeks Postpartum.*** Cheryl Zauderer. Amarillo, TX: Praeclarus Press, 2016. 210 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1939807434

The period immediately following the birth of a newborn can be a tumultuous time of uncertainty, exhaustion, and discomfort for a new mother and family. In *Maternity Leave: A New Mother's Guide to the First Six Weeks Postpartum*, author Cheryl Zauderer helps new mothers navigate challenging times throughout this transition and answers many of the questions new families are confronted with. Zauderer tackles several main topics, including post-baby body, breastfeeding, love and sex, bonding, and most significantly in my opinion, mood disorders. *Maternity Leave* speaks to the spectrum of readers post-birth; whether it's your first baby or fifth, whether you have an abundance or lack of financial resources, and whether you have a large or limited support system, this book is for you. Zauderer speaks to the challenges of postpartum without pathologizing the experience, but rather allows for a normalization of many fears new mothers face. Overall, I was impressed with the content of Zauderer's work. However, there were some sections that lacked clarity, organization, inclusivity, and a personal element, which failed to consistently maintain this reader's attention.

Although the physical postpartum period has existed since the beginning of time, the topic of postpartum physical, mental, and emotional health has only recently been openly discussed as something within a new mother's control. Of critical importance is the focus on mental and emotional components of the postpartum period, which are often neglected in a culture dominated by western medicine. Zauderer fills a much-needed gap in education for new mothers, not only with what do and expect as they heal physically, but how to heal emotionally and mentally post-birth. Zauderer doesn't necessarily tell women what to do; rather she empowers them to assess what they need and speak up for themselves, while validating the spectrum of varied experiences. A main message throughout the book is to take care of yourself, by enlisting the help of others, letting your body rest, and checking in with yourself, so that you can be the best mother you can be. Zauderer says this is important because

“there has never been a time in your life when you have had so many changes to your body and your mind” (p. 11).

In my opinion, the greatest asset of *Maternity Leave* is its relatability. At the beginning of each chapter, Zauderer quotes specific thoughts and questions new mothers may have related to a certain topic. Zauderer also integrates paragraphs acknowledging the spectrum of varied experiences and individual differences in a series of statements starting with “you may.” The author then takes the time to give specific answers to commonly asked questions. Zauderer’s book offers a guide with step-by-step how-to’s on topics including skin-to-skin contact, nutrition, baby wearing, Kegel exercises, pain relief, healing techniques, alleviating PMS symptoms, and splinting a cesarean incision. Zauderer also devotes an entire chapter to postpartum mood disorders, explaining each of the different depression and anxiety disorders’ symptoms and prevalence. While there has been an increase in awareness of postpartum depression and the baby blues, largely due to celebrity influences, there is a lack of information on the spectrum of mental health concerns post-baby and a significant stigma of mental illness still persists for new mothers. This chapter’s focus on mental health can help encourage women, partners, or loved ones to seek help when needed, reduce the fear of what could be wrong, and allow families to take steps to prevent, recognize, and intervene following signs of postpartum mood and anxiety disorders.

Although Zauderer covers an abundance of information in her short and easy-to-read book, there are some topics that could have been explored further, including newborn sleep behaviors and how to handle sleep. At one-point, Zauderer suggests not putting the newborn on a strict sleep schedule, and another time she states the baby should not be left to cry-it-out alone. However, she does not address what parents should do in regards to sleeping, how often they should sleep, and how to tolerate the stress of a newborn’s sporadic sleep regimen. Zauderer also mentions how breastfeeding with your infant in bed can be a risk factor for sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), but she does not discuss the other risk factors and recommended practices for safe sleep during infancy. This is particularly important, because SIDS is the leading cause of death for children under one year of age. I believe more information regarding this topic should have been included in a book focused on the first six weeks postpartum.

Overall, the layout of *Maternity Leave* is sensible and easy to follow. I found the most beneficial organizational components to be the thorough contraception chart and various lists of to-do’s, symptoms, or recommendations. However, I thought some of these lists could have been more succinct and clear. For example, the diet and nutrition chapter could include a sample weekly or daily meal or snack suggestion, while the partner chapter could include more exact steps on topics such as burping and skin-to-skin contact. Zauderer incorporates photos of each different breastfeeding position that I found to be immensely helpful. I believe

additional images could be helpful to clarify information such as swaddling, diapering, and newborn bathing.

One section I had a particularly hard time getting through was post-baby body and post-baby cesarean. Even as someone with a background in medicine as a nursing student, these two chapters felt overloaded with medical information that I found to be both daunting and laborious to read through. Although I believe it is important for new families to be educated on health complications, I think these chapters could benefit from personal stories to break up the constant list of symptoms, and could be written using lighter, more colloquial terminology. Another issue I find is a brief mention of biofeedback, without any description of what it is and why it should be used.

At the end of each chapter, Zauderer includes a resource page that I find to be tremendously helpful as a place for families to locate additional information on certain topics that may pique their interest as they read. Additionally, the suggested reading at the end of the book is helpful for gathering more information. However, I think these resources could be better organized into an integrated section on resources (books, websites, etc.) by topic, rather than alphabetically by author, so that they are easy to find based on what the reader wants to know. Further, an index and/or glossary with relevant definitions and where you can find additional information on the topic in the book would be beneficial for quick and easy references to guide readers in real time.

Finally, I would be remiss not to mention Zauderer's impeccable credentials, which provide her with the necessary expertise in postpartum mental and physical health. Zauderer's background includes a PhD in Psychology, Certified Nurse Midwife, Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurse Practitioner, and Certified Lactation Consultant. In addition to these impressive degrees, she has an abundance of experience with postpartum women as a psychologist in private practice, as a registered nurse for 30 years, and as an assistant professor at Hofstra Northwell. The appropriate use of references throughout the book suggest the presence of significant academic influence on her work. Zauderer has written more than a dozen articles in professional journals on perinatal mental health. She is highly qualified to write about the first six weeks postpartum and is likely among the most informed and experienced writers on the topic.

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