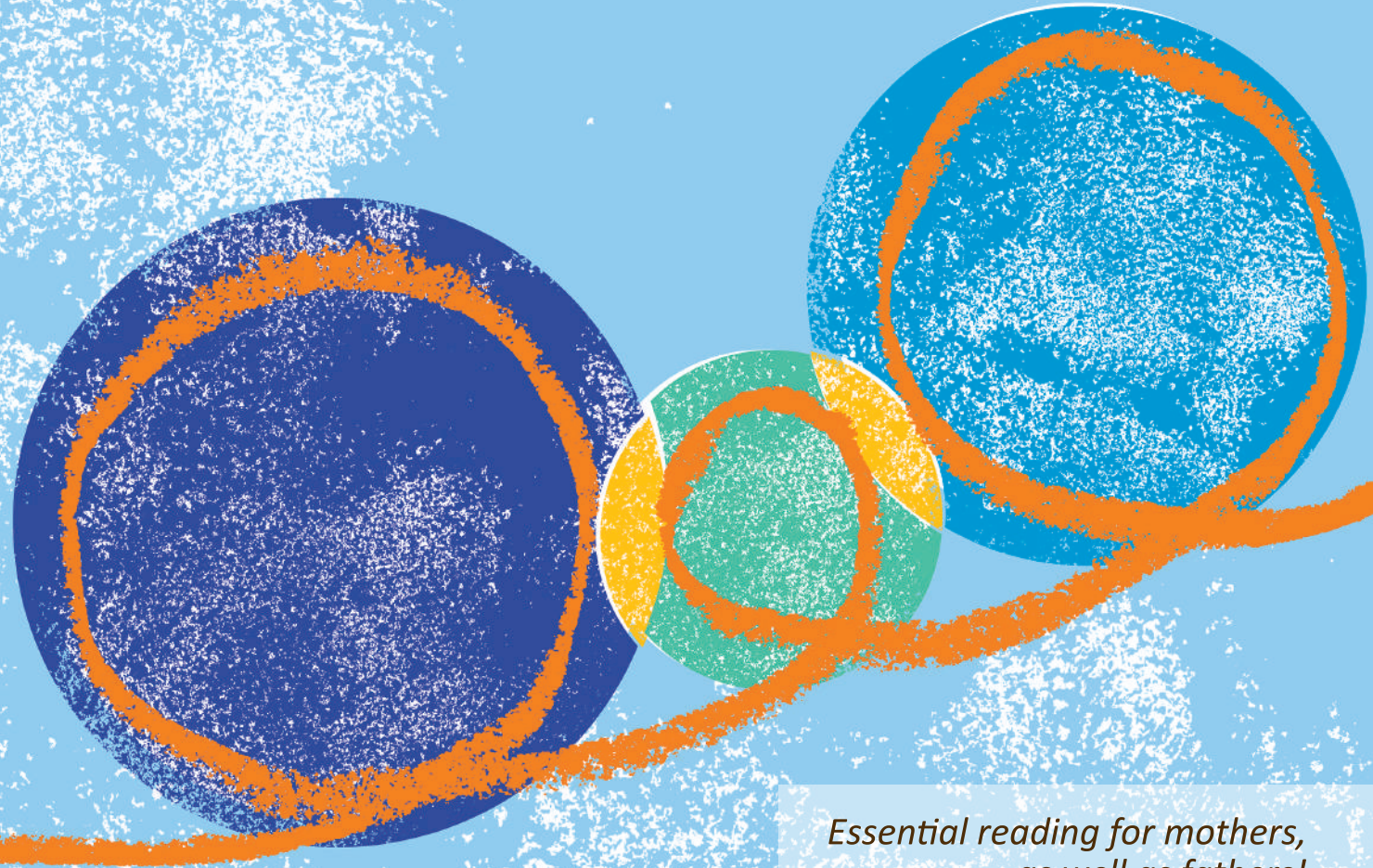


# A Study on Postpartum Life

The reality of the bodies and minds of women after childbirth



*Essential reading for mothers,  
as well as fathers!*

NPO MadreBonita

**Physical Conditions and Marital Relationships  
Immediately After Childbirth**

NPO MadreBonita A Study on Postpartum Life Project

# **A Report on the Postpartum Body and Mind**


Vol.1

**Physical Conditions and  
Marital Relationships  
Immediately After Childbirth**

This booklet contains the results of  
a questionnaire survey of 620 people,  
as well as interviews with 15 participants  
of the Postpartum Healthcare and  
Fitness Program offered by  
**NPO MadreBonita**



**A Study on Postpartum Life Project**



## Why do we need a report on the postpartum period now?

### **The postpartum period follows every childbirth.**

Pregnancy and childbirth are extremely important events for families, and they make us realize how precious human life really is. However, childbirth is just one stepping-stone in our lives. The days *after* childbirth bring about much bigger changes within the family than childbirth itself does. While the world is practically overflowing with information about childrearing, it is very hard to find information on how the bodies and minds of women change after childbirth. As a result, many women are stunned by the reality of postpartum life, facing unexpected troubles physically and emotionally, as well as tension in their marriages.

### **Accurate knowledge enables mothers to prepare themselves, and it also helps the people around new mothers to offer the appropriate support.**

Since mothers in this stage are busy with childrearing and tend to become isolated, they take on all the confusion and trouble of postpartum life by themselves. As a result, the problems of the postpartum period have been overlooked by others, and have not been discussed in public. If this situation continues as it is, expecting women will be forced to continue to face the postpartum period without enough knowledge, which will result only in even more confusion. The families of mothers, as well as government entities, are also at a loss, not knowing how to support new mothers. We started A Study on Postpartum Life Project in order to break this vicious cycle.

### **The theme of Volume One is the postpartum body and marital relationships.**

A Study on Postpartum Life Project started with a questionnaire survey of 620 women. The women reported physical problems that weren't immediately apparent, as well as deterioration of mental conditions as a result of those problems. There were also many more women than we had expected that answered they felt their marital relationships had worsened. Some women who filled out the survey hesitated about whether or not they should tell us their embarrassing stories. Some of the stories in this booklet are very different from the one people usually hear, which goes something like, "My life is happy and dream-like with my baby." We included these stories because they also represent one side of the postpartum reality.

### **The problems with the postpartum body and mind are not the issue of the individual, but rather of society.**

Children are treasures of society. The national government, as well as local governments, put extensive effort into supporting pregnancy, childbirth, and childrearing as a measure against the declining birthrate and aging population of Japan. As for postpartum care, there has yet to be specific discussions, let alone extensive research, studies, or established policies. Although mothers are aware that their physical and mental health has a large effect on childrearing, their families, and even their local communities, postpartum care has been considered by many as simply a private problem. Through this report on the reality of the bodies and minds of postpartum women, A Study on Postpartum Life Project hopes to create an opportunity for society as a whole to think about the mental and physical health issues that are present during the postpartum period.

# Table of Contents

<b>Preface</b>	Why do we need a report on the postpartum period now? .....	2
----------------	---	---

## Part.1 Survey – The Postpartum Body

Q. After delivery, did you feel that your body was more relaxed (or more at ease) than it was during pregnancy? .....	6
---	---

Q. What kind of physical problems did you have? Top 3 Body Shape Issues .....	7
--	---

Q. On sleeping, problems with breastfeeding, urinary incontinence, hemorrhoids, and problems around the perineum <Group Interviews> The unexpected troubles after childbirth. This is what happened to me... ..	8
---	---

Surveys regarding puerperal period. Q. Where did you stay after childbirth? / Did you stay at your parents' home? Q. Whom did you ask for help around the house? / Are you satisfied with your husband's support? .....	10
--	----

<Open question> Things we regret about how we spent our puerperal period ...	11
--	----

<i>Special Report 1</i> .....	12
Experiences with postpartum support services Chisato's experience. A normal day, two months after childbirth.	

Advise for women during and after pregnancy from Ms. Sou, a midwife. ....	14
---	----

Communication worksheet for labor and the puerperal period .....	15
--	----

## Part.2 Survey – Marital relationships after childbirth

Q. Was your husband present while you were in labor? / Was your husband present during delivery? / Does your husband understand your postpartum physical problems? .....	16
--	----

Q. How has the amount of conversation with your husband changed since you gave birth? / What do you and your partner talk about? / How satisfied are you with your conversations with your husband? / How did your husband's life change? <Group Interviews> About communication with one's husband .....	17
--	----

<i>Special Report 2</i> About sex after childbirth / Round-table talk on sex after childbirth .....	18
--	----

<Column> About Postpartum Marital Relationships: Kanako Nakai, postpartum healthcare trainer .....	21
---	----

<b>Part.3</b>	Survey on a postpartum healthcare program / MadreBonita's postpartum healthcare .....	22
---------------	---	----

Q. How did you like the program? / Have your physical problems improved since you took part in the program?	
---	--

Q. Has your mental status improved after participating in the program? / Has your relationship with your husband improved since you took part in the program? .....	23
---	----

<Participants' Thoughts> "I'm glad I joined this program!" "This program brought about such big changes!" .....	24
--	----

<i>Special Report 3</i> How does the husband see his wife after childbirth? <Survey of husbands>	
---	--

Q. Has your wife changed after childbirth? / Have you changed after childbirth? ...	26
---	----

Q. What was difficult or hard for you? Q. Is there anything you would like to say to husbands who are about to face their wives' postpartum period? .....	27
--	----

<b>Interviews</b>	Postpartum Body and Mind – Interviews The birth of a child is a symbol of happiness. But in reality...? .....	28
-------------------	--	----

<i>Interview 1</i> In the days after I had my second child, getting a divorce crossed my mind many times. ....	30
---	----

<i>Interview 2</i> My husband cooperated with me after childbirth, though we had had big fights before. ....	32
---	----

<i>Interview 3</i> Childbirth is not the goal, but rather the beginning. ....	34
--	----

<b>Upon completion of The Postpartum Statement</b> Maco Yoshioka, Executive Director of MadreBonita .....	36
--	----

Notes .....	38-39
-------------	-------

What is MadreBonita? .....	39
----------------------------	----

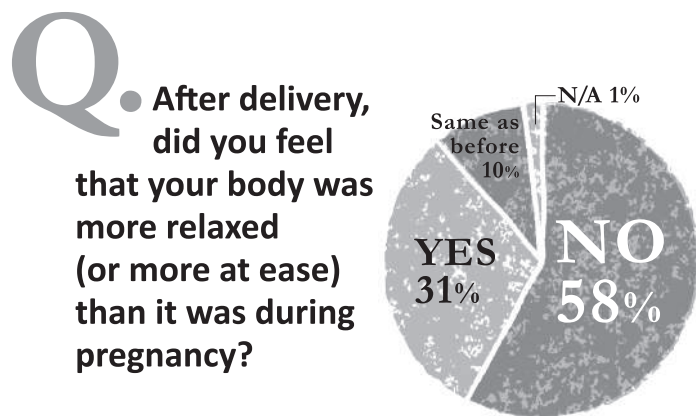
### Outline of our survey

<b>Survey Method:</b> 1) Distribute and collect self-completed questionnaire form 2) Input and retrieve data using a dedicated website	<b>Survey period:</b> July 1, 2008 - Jan. 15, 2009 <b>Respondents:</b> 620 postpartum women <b>Survey Region:</b> throughout Japan	<b>Number of samples:</b> 620 responses to questionnaires, 174 responses on the website, 3 invalid responses
--	---	---

## Part 1 Survey

# The Postpartum Body

Damage to one's body and exhaustion caused by childbirth is much greater than we expect. But people pay *less* attention to you than they did during pregnancy, and it is much harder for postpartum mothers to complain about their problems in the face of cute babies. In this section we investigate what kind of actual problems postpartum mothers experienced (or did not experience).



More than half of women surveyed said that their physical condition had *not* improved even after childbirth.

Many women have troubles such as sluggishness, morning sickness, and urinary incontinence (UI) during pregnancy, and it seems that these disorders do not always go away after childbirth. (refer to page 7)

Due to the loosening of hip joints and widening of the pelvis caused by delivery, women may experience

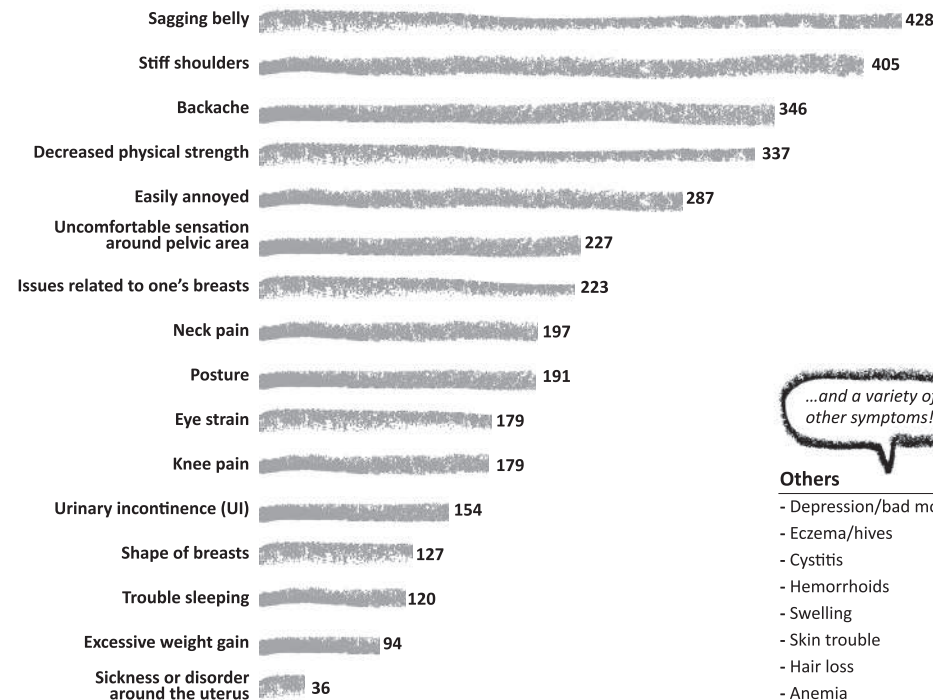
incontinence (due to muscle weakness or desensitization), uncomfortable or unpleasant sensations in the pelvis area, or troubles related to the breasts due to breastfeeding. And it is likely that all of these troubles and disorders were not expected during pregnancy.

This survey shows that the phrase "you'll feel much

better after giving birth," which pregnant women often hear, is only a consolation. In actuality, many women begin their childrearing with physical problems.

## Q. What kind of physical problems did you have?

(620 respondents / multiple answers allowed)



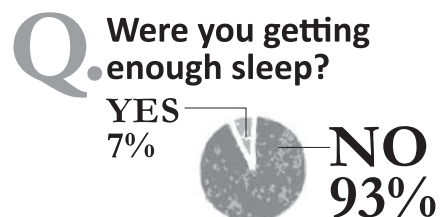
"I can't return to my original weight and body shape." Physical issues represent a serious postpartum problem, and they aren't just about looks.

Magazines and TV programs are focused heavily on women's body shape and weight. This survey also shows that many women feel self-conscious about their body shape, perhaps due to influence from the media. However, the things that essential in improving one's body shape are stamina and muscle strength. Without

them, physical problems are sure to continue, and it will of course be difficult to regain one's original body shape. What postpartum women need to do first is to restore their health – to face their own bodies, and not to be swayed by the media.

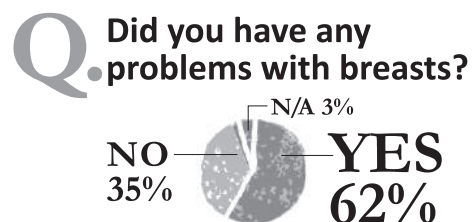
### Body Shape Issues Top 3

- 1 Sagging belly 69%**
- 2 Bad posture 45%**
- 3 Shape of breasts 21%**



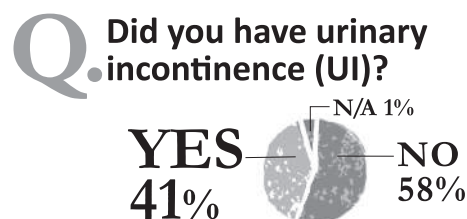
- Wasn't getting enough/wanted to sleep more 35%
- It was OK, although it wasn't quite enough 58%

Babies don't sleep in long spans like adults, although there are individual differences. Mothers tend to experience a chronic lack of sleep.



- Nipples were injured 25%
- They just hurt 16%
- Had a fever (got mastitis, etc.) 14%

Issues with one's breasts occur after starting breastfeeding. Out of those who experienced such trouble, some mothers even began to find breastfeeding itself too troublesome.



- Yes, everyday 4%
- Yes, sometimes 31%
- Still having troubles 6%

UI is widely perceived as a problem unique to pregnant women. But some people experience this problem after childbirth.

## The unexpected troubles after childbirth.

This is what happened to me... Stories heard during group interviews concerning personal physical issues, which we all normally feel too shy to talk about, even with our friends.

### Urinary Incontinence (UI)

- I had UI frequently and at unpredictable times. It even seemed like the postpartum pad was made to absorb urine rather than blood.

- I had UI everyday for one month after giving birth. Even after that, just coughing or jumping caused urine to leak.



### Breasts and nipples

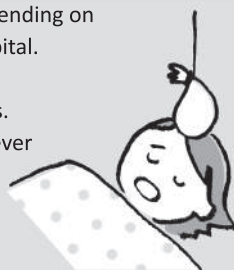
- I had a blocked milk duct, and my breasts became tight, hard, and painful.

- I had a kind of blood blister on my nipples that hurt really badly.

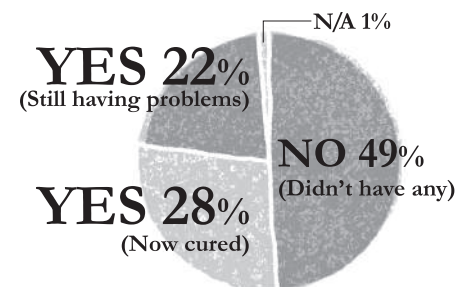
- The first three months after giving birth were like hell because I didn't know how to breastfeed correctly.

- I got confused because instructions were different depending on the maternity hospital.

- I often had mastitis. I had chills and a fever of 104°F (40°C).



## Q. Did you have any problems with hemorrhoids?

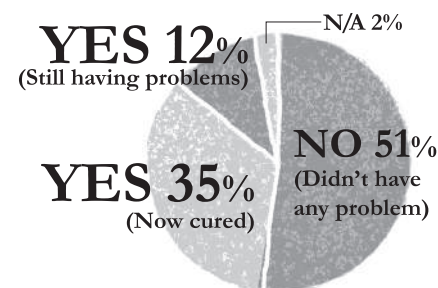


When did you first have hemorrhoids?

- Before pregnancy 36%
- During pregnancy 26%
- After childbirth 38%

For many people, the problem of hemorrhoids starts during pregnancy, not after childbirth.

## Q. Did you have any problems around the perineum (pubic area)?



What kind of symptoms did you have?

- Wounds were painful 5%
- Loosening of the vagina (water entering while bathing, etc.) 22%
- Cramps at area that was sutured 22%
- Wounds were itchy 6%

Even though the pain from episiotomies gets better, some people have uncomfortable sensations such as loosening of the vagina.

## The unexpected troubles after childbirth.

### Hemorrhoids

- I had hemorrhoids during pregnancy, and they didn't go away after giving birth.
- I treated my piles with commercially available drugs.

### Afterpains

- My afterpains were awful, especially after my second time giving birth. My uterus contracted whenever I breastfed my child. The pains were so severe that I got fed up with breastfeeding.

### Visceroptosis and uterine prolapse

- One or two days after giving birth, I felt something weird while I was taking a shower at the hospital. I couldn't put any strength into my belly. I exercised to a video given to me by the hospital, and by the time I left the hospital I wasn't as concerned about it.
- I felt like my internal organs were sinking downward. I was surprised when I was diagnosed with uterine prolapse.

### Episiotomy<sup>1</sup>

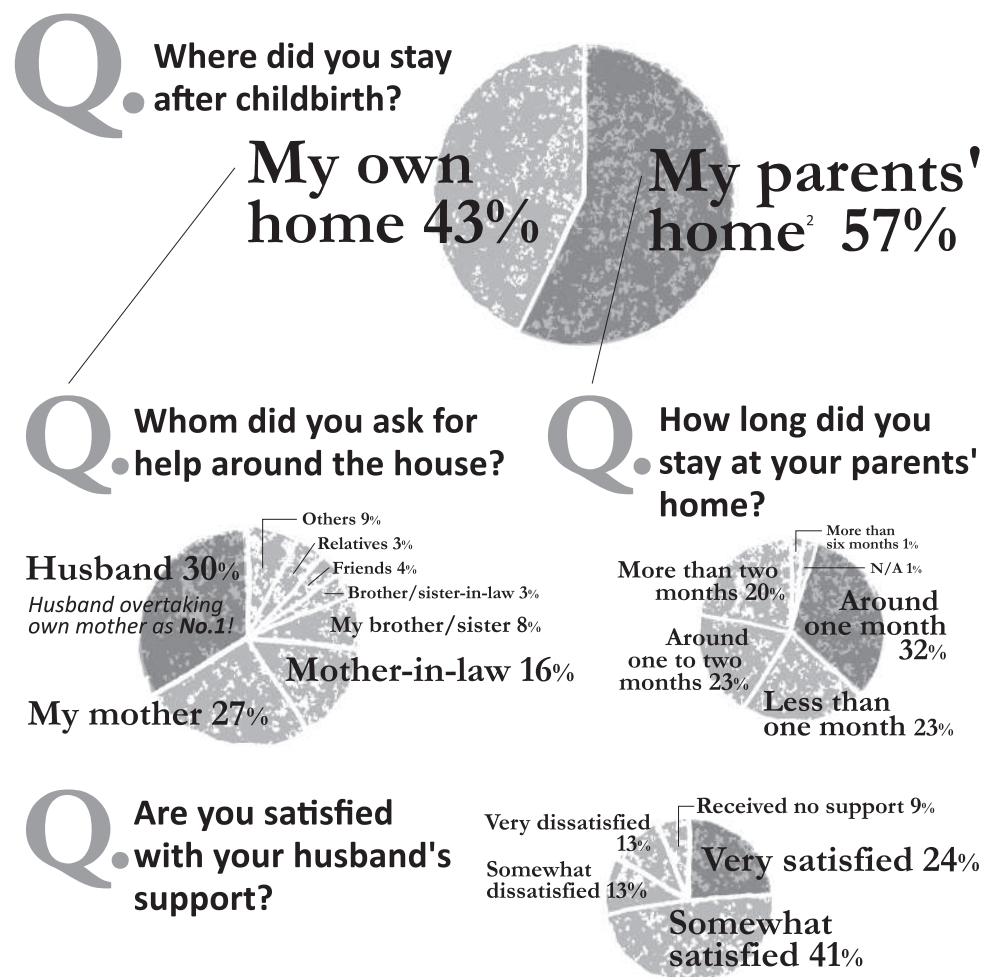
- I was shocked that my perineum was going to be "incised and sutured."
- The episiotomy caused swelling in my perineum, and I couldn't even sit down because of the intense pain.
- I can't tell my husband about my episiotomy in detail because I'm worried he would be scared.



## Part 1 Survey

# The puerperal period

The puerperal period refers to approximately one month long period of rest after giving birth. In order to fully rest the body exhausted by childbirth and to recover from the physical troubles experienced after giving birth, it is recommended that during this period women spend their days in bed and don't do anything around the house except breastfeeding and changing diapers. It is in the puerperal period that women's lives can change drastically from before pregnancy. Let's take a look at where and how postpartum women live their lives during this time.



## Things we wish we had done during our puerperal period ! Looking back I regret that...

Memories of the puerperal period are easy to glorify, such as, "It was really hard, but I got through it because my baby was so cute!" But the reality of the puerperal period is not so simple. Many mothers suffer for not taking the puerperal period seriously. You, who will give birth in the future, or support puerperal mothers, can alleviate postpartum stresses by referring to the following episodes, understanding the reality of the situation, and taking appropriate precautions.



**“I should have relied more on my husband.**

I spent the postpartum period alone with my husband. Because I used cloth diapers, I started doing the laundry from the second day after getting back from the hospital. I thought it would be easy since all I had to do was hang them up, but I came down with a high fever on the tenth day. I shouldn't have insisted on using cloth diapers, but instead should have just started using them after my condition got better. My husband told me, "I'll do the washing after I get back," but I couldn't ask him after he just came home after a long day at work.

**“I should have asked someone to drop off and pick up my oldest child...**

I brought my oldest child to and from the childcare with my two other children in tow just one month after childbirth. Now I think that I should have asked a babysitter to do it, even just in either the morning or the evening. It was cold out and it was hard on me, so it was probably hard on my one-month-old as well.

**“Having to hold back around my mother-in-law and being told heartless things by my father-in-law made me cry.**

Since my own mother had already passed away, my mother-in-law came to my house almost every day during my postpartum period. Though it was helpful that she made and brought meals, I was too reserved to ask her for any other help around the house. Far from it, I even served tea to her, which was a really heavy burden. Furthermore, my father-in-law sometimes came along with her and said things that rubbed me the wrong way... If I'd known this would have happened, I'd have used a housekeeping service.

**“I should have talked with my mother in advance.**

I asked my own mother to come help me in my home. But I couldn't get enough rest, because she was always asking me simple questions like "where is the seasoning," or "what should I do with this," and so on. It really is important to arrange things prior to giving birth when you still have both time and capacity.

## Special Report 1

# Experiences with postpartum support services

It's hard to get through the puerperal period without any help from outside the family. Many opinions similar to this one can be seen on page 11 in, "Things we wish we had done during our puerperal period!" Housekeeping and childcare support services are there for such situations. It's better for us to take advantage of these services and be freed from stress in the puerperal period so we can enjoy our time with our families.

## Interviewee profile:



## Chisato Kitazawa

(33 y/o, Tokyo), living with her husband (33 y/o), daughter (3 y/o), and son (2 months). After childbirth, Chisato went to stay at her parents' home for three weeks, and then returned to Tokyo for her one-month medical checkup.

### What are "postpartum (puerperal) support services"?

Also called "postpartum sitters" or "postpartum helpers," these services provide housekeeping and baby-sitting for postpartum families. Most of these services are provided by civilian organizations, local communities, and NPOs.

They cost from around ¥1,000 (about \$12) to ¥3,000 (\$36) per hour. Chisato (who shares her experiences here) used a service provided by an local community organization, and it cost ¥1,000 per hour (¥1,200 (\$15) per hour on holidays).

### What kind of postpartum support service did you use?

- Hanging laundry
- Folding laundry
- Ironing
- Vacuuming
- Cleaning up the bathroom
- Precooking

## About the current living situation

Two months have passed since I gave birth. After giving birth, I stayed at my parents' house for about one month before returning to my own home in Tokyo. At my parents' house, I got plenty of rest and received a great deal of help from my mother, and also from my sister who lives nearby. They did all the housework, and also took care of Miori (my eldest daughter). But since returning to Tokyo,

I've actually had quite a tough time. Of course my husband is helpful, but there are still a lot of little things that I have to do myself, so it's hard for me to sleep in long stretches and I don't feel rested.

### Why did you use the service and how did your husband react?

Right after I came back home from my parents' house to Tokyo, life seemed to switch back into "normal mode" and I tried to do everything by

myself. I got completely exhausted after a week, and suffered from physical disorders such as not producing enough breast milk. This made me decide to use the postpartum support services that I had checked out before giving birth. My husband wanted me to prepare meals, but on the other hand, he understood wanting to outsource the housekeeping and babysitting work, other than cooking, so he agreed to use these kinds of services.



### Chisato's experience.

#### A normal day, two months after childbirth.

6:30AM Wakes up and prepares breakfast. Takes out the garbage etc.

7:45AM Her husband Daisuke leaves home to go to work.

9:00AM Puts daughter and son in the car to take Miori to a Ninsho (local government-approved) childcare.<sup>3</sup>

After coming back home, she does the normal housework such as cleaning, doing the laundry, preparing meals, and taking care of her baby. The day passes quickly since she has to change the baby's diapers many times and since breastfeeding sessions are frequent and long. She wants to finish preparations for dinner and give the baby a bath before picking up her daughter, so she misses the chance to take a nap even though she feels tired.

5:00PM Drives to pick up Miori.

6:30PM Dinner.

7:30PM Takes a bath with Miori.

9:00PM Dozes off while putting Miori to sleep...

10:00PM Daisuke comes home. Prepares dinner for him.

10:30PM Daisuke has dinner.

11:30PM Goes to bed - Wakes up about twice a night to breastfeed and to change the baby's diaper. \*Many times Daisuke takes care of changing diapers during the night.



## What is your impression of the service?

The helper that was sent from the municipal service I used was just an ordinary people who had been trained. She also had a child in elementary school. For the two hours she came, I asked her to help with the things listed on the previous page. Cleaning and doing the laundry had been a burden for me, and that's what I mostly asked for. After using the service and

looking at a clean room and neatly folded laundry, I realized how thankful I felt for receiving a helping hand. Because usually I'm the one who's taking care of others, you know?

### The key is to prepare in advance. I wish there was more information about these services.

The key for using such services is to make a list and to set priorities about what you might

want to ask for help with. Also, it's important to gather information and to register with the service provider before childbirth, because everything becomes so busy after giving birth. My concern is that there is so little information about such services. Also I felt that these services were hard to call on—it felt as if they were only for "people in a desperate situation." I wish the services were easier to use so that more people could use them without hesitation.

## Advise for women during and after pregnancy from Ms. Sou, a midwife.

### We asked a midwife, Ms. Shoko Sou, about life during the puerperal period, postpartum changes in the body, and about marital relationship.

There has been an age-old belief in Japan concerning how to spend the puerperal period, that is, that one should rest quietly in bed for 21 days and avoid any kind of household chores including washing and kitchen work. I think this is a very good practice. Even if women look the same as they did before pregnancy and seem like they're back on their feet, women in the puerperal period need to rest and recover, not to strain their eyes by using their mobile phone, watching TV, or reading books.

During delivery, not only the baby, but also the mother's placenta, blood, and amnion liquid come out of the body all at once. In addition, the pelvis is wobbly, and there are changes in the hormone balance.

However, recently there has been an increase in postpartum women who cannot feel the changes in their body.

Many of them are not conscious of any tension in the stomach, stiffness of shoulders, or postpartum fatigue. Childbirth can and should be a good opportunity for these women to be more connected with their own bodies.

And it's important to make your husband realize how hard it is for you, physically and emotionally, after giving birth. Instead of just saying that you don't have time to talk, it's important for the two of you to willfully make time to talk. I want to stress the importance of spending time alone with your partner, even if you have to ask someone to take care of your child.

For example, as is also written in this booklet, it's natural for postpartum women not to want to have sex due to their hormone balance during breastfeeding. In such cases, it is important for men to understand their partner's

body condition in the postpartum period, and for women not only to make requests to their husbands, but to also make efforts to communicate with them.

Caring for each other, having physical contact including sex, and really communicating with body and soul, are important for working out differences and for maintaining a good relationship.

#### Ms. Shoko Sou

President of Matsugaoka Birth Center and Vice-president of the Tokyo Midwives Association. Graduated from the Law Department of Chuo University. Decided to be a midwife at the age of 36, after giving birth to her first child. Entered the Health Care Science Division in the Faculty of Medicine at Tokyo Medical And Dental University, and had her second and third children while at university. Has practiced at Matsugaoka Birth Center since 1998, after working for a hospital and a birth center for several years.

## Communication worksheet for labor and the puerperal period

You can save yourself some worry if you have a concrete discussion with your husband, or the person who will help you during the puerperal period, and make a plan with him/her while you are pregnant. First, please fill out the form below separately, and then talk with each other about your feelings so you can get on the same page.

**Me:  
During  
labor**

What kind of support do I want to get from my husband during labor?

**Husband:  
During  
labor**

What kind of support do you want to provide your wife during her labor?

**Me:  
Puerperal  
period**

What kind of support do I want to get from my husband in the puerperal period?

**Husband:  
Puerperal  
period**

What kind of support do you want to provide your wife in her puerperal period?

### CHECK LISTS

- ☐ Arranging a caregiver for the older child/children during the daytime
- ☐ Taking the older child/children to and from the childcare or kindergarten.
- ☐ Arranging for someone to prepare meals, letting him/her know where the cooking utensils are, and giving them a menu.
- ☐ Sharing how you would like the house cleaned and showing him/her where the cleaning items are and how to use them.
- ☐ Preparing for "uchi-iwai", which is the custom in Japan to give gifts to friends and relatives as a way of saying thank you for them celebrating the birth of your child.
- ☐ Taking care of the older child/children at home.
- ☐ Dealing with visitors.
- ☐ Doing laundry (washing, hanging, folding, and putting away clothes)
- ☐ Sharing information about how to separate garbage and the garbage collection days.

## Part 2 | Survey

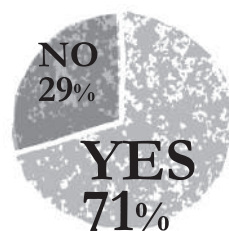
# Marital relationships after childbirth

It's less rare now for husbands to be present during delivery compared to the past. It's a great and joyful opportunity, partly because your husband is able to understand how hard childbirth can be. But how well do couples understand each other's wellness of mind and body after childbirth? We surveyed married couples about their communication, their conversations, and their sex lives after childbirth.

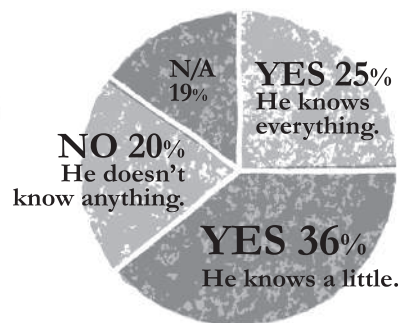
**Q. Was your husband present while you were in labor?**



**Q. Was your husband present during delivery?**



**Q. Does your husband understand your postpartum physical problems?**



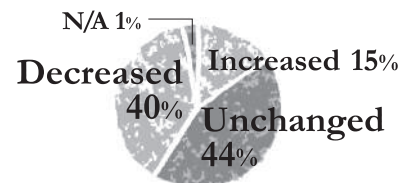
## Is it difficult to share your postpartum physical problems?

There are many women who overcome intense labor pains and greet their babies for the first time together with their husbands. However, most husbands' understanding of postpartum physical problems still seems

insufficient, even if they are able to share how difficult and moving childbirth itself is. According to the survey on the next page, it also seems that couples sometimes hardly have even time to talk to each other.

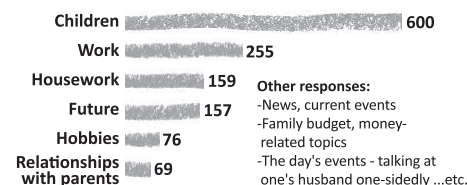
Perhaps more important than the level of understanding of one's husband is the reality that couples are too busy to adequately communicate, since their hands are full taking care of the baby.

**Q. How has the amount of conversation with your husband changed since you gave birth?**

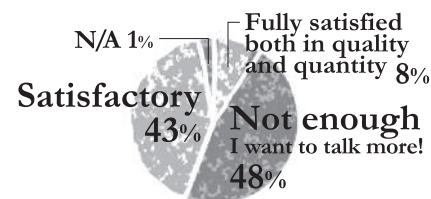


**Q. What do you and your partner talk about?**

(620 respondents, multiple answers were allowed)

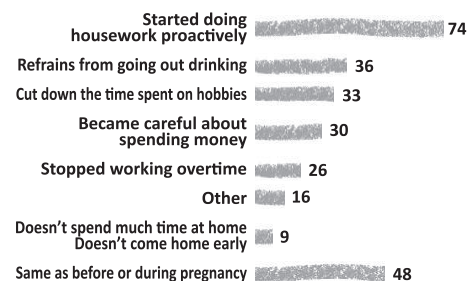


**Q. How satisfied are you with your conversations with your husband?**



**Q. How did your husband's life change?**

(174 respondents, multiple answers allowed)



## About communication with one's husband...

After looking back I realized...

I didn't know how my husband could help me out, so I was trying to do everything by myself, even though "our" baby is not only mine but ours... :-(

I was sad that I was irritated with my husband and getting fed up with him, although I should have been happy because our baby was cute and also growing up and developing well. :-(

Despite his cooperation with doing housework and caring for our child, I got angry with my husband when he said, "You're so lucky to be with our baby all the time," although I knew he didn't say it with any bad intentions. :-(

That was helpful!

It's better to get your husband to help with each of the important points of child rearing. Being with the baby all day long can get a bit tiring and you can't relax. :-(

It's very helpful when my husband at least goes out with the older child. Also, don't complain when your husband does the things that you ask him to do...!! :-(

In reality, parents of newborn babies are so busy with taking care of their baby that it becomes more difficult for them to take time to talk with each other. Since both parents give their attention to the baby, there is a tendency that the baby becomes the center of their conversations. We can see that husbands don't drastically change their lifestyles as soon as their baby is born, and changes are highly individual.

## Special Report 2

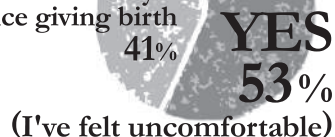
# About sex after childbirth

So if postpartum women keep having physical problems, and couples are not able to have enough conversation... Then surely there must be some serious problems in their sex lives as well! Next is our survey on postpartum sex life, which is certainly not a popular topic for conversation...

**Q. Did you have sex with your husband in the past month?<sup>4</sup>**



I don't know, I haven't had sex yet since giving birth



**Q. Have you ever felt uncomfortable while having sex after childbirth?**

**Q. For the people who felt uncomfortable having sex after childbirth, what did you feel exactly?**

(91 respondents, multiple answers allowed)

1st	Perineal pain	57
2nd	Breast pain	28
3rd	Felt embarrassed	24
4th	Felt like the child was looking at us	24
5th	Didn't want to be touched	23

\*Other responses:

"He forced me even though I didn't want to do it," "It was just disgusting," "I suffered engorgement of my breasts," etc.

## Round-table talk on sex after childbirth

## How did sex change after childbirth?

We discussed a topic that these women never dared to talk about with anyone else.

The participants were the following four women



**Mrs. A**  
7 months after childbirth, one child



**Mrs. B**  
13 months after childbirth, two children



**Mrs. C**  
15 months after childbirth, one child



**Mrs. D**  
22 months after childbirth, one child

### My sex drive dropped sharply after childbirth...

**Moderator:** So, I'll be frank and direct. Are you having sex?

**B:** I have less sex since I gave birth. Because, in my case, well, my perineum tore while my husband and I were making love. It was about 3 months after I had my first child..

**Everyone:** What!!

**B:** After that I became afraid of having sex. But I wanted a second child, so I set my sights on "that day of the month." I also disliked sex after having my second child, so I pretend to be asleep when my husband wants sex.

**C:** I started having sex again five months after childbirth, and we made love for the fourth time during a trip we took together recently. Actually, my husband is more afraid of sex, because he cares about my body. He's also disturbed by the fact that our child sleeps by our side.<sup>5</sup>

**D:** We also have less sex after childbirth than before. It's down to about one-tenth of what it was. Now, it's just about twice a month.

**All:** Then, you previously did it twenty times a month? (laughs)

**D:** Well, yes, we were madly in love with each other when I got pregnant, and were looking forward to the day when we could lift the ban on sex, one month after childbirth. But as for me, I lost my sexual desire after childbirth, feeling totally different from my old self. Now I'm recovering little by little, but it's not the same as before childbirth, actually...

**A:** Then it's me, just seven months after childbirth, that's the one who does it most (laughs). It's because my husband is making an effort not to be sexless after childbirth. But honestly, sometimes I just don't want him to touch my body, or I feel disgusted by the

saliva, so I don't really enjoy it.

**B:** Why do we end up not wanting to have sex after childbirth? As for me, I loved it so much before childbirth (laughs), so I never thought I would become like this.

**D:** I agree. Even now I can enjoy it once we start making love, but still, in the first few minutes, I feel as if it's just too much of a bother (laughs).

**C:** I feel some pain even after having sex for the fourth time, maybe because I don't get wet enough.

### What do your lonely husbands do?

**A:** In this kind of circumstance, there's always the possibility that our husbands might cheat on us.

**B:** I'm not sure about cheating, but I have found naughty images on his PC.

**D:** I found porn videos at home about two months after childbirth. We had a fight about it, though I knew he couldn't help it.... Aren't you all bothered by that kind of thing?

**A:** My husband and I are open about it, so I know where those kinds of DVDs are placed (laughs).

**C:** There are some in our house as well. I feel that we can't do much about it. After all, watching DVDs is a hundred times better than him going out and paying to get something done (laughs).



## Life during the day is important

**A:** Recently I've come to think that physical problems aren't the only reason why we have less interest in sex. Don't you think it's also because we have some small complaints about our husbands related to postpartum childrearing? I am having a tough time with childrearing. But I hesitate to tell my husband about it because I know he is also having a hard time. But I still want him to understand. My husband, on the other hand, might be feeling lonely with me giving all my time to our child.

**C:** After we women give birth, our lives change completely. On the other hand, men can leave the house and keep the same life as before.

**B:** Men might just be confused, because only their wife has changed.

**D:** But I also think I've come to see my husband as a "man" again, since we came to understand each other gradually after fighting a lot. So we can't just keep holding that kind of hazy feeling inside ourselves, don't you think?

**Moderator:** Sex is only one part of the

relationship with your partner, so perhaps it's difficult to find the true nature of the problem if you focus on sex alone, right?

**C:** Our attitudes toward our husbands might be important.

**A:** I think I'll be nice to my husband tonight (laughs).

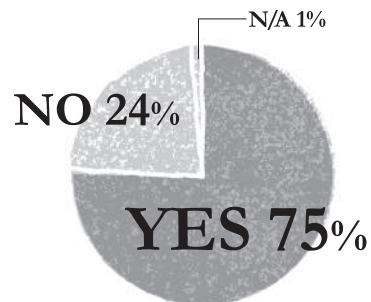
### When is it OK to start having sex again after childbirth?

In most cases, it is fine to resume sex as long as there are no particular problems found at the one-month medical check-up.

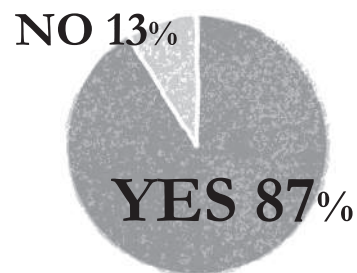
After childbirth, however, the vaginal mucosa is likely to become dry due to hormonal influences, which may cause pain during sex. It is important to get one's husband to understand such matters.

In this period, women are exhausted enough because of taking care of the baby. Many of those with experience say that it would be better to wait for a while and to take it easy until you regain your peace of mind.

**Q.** Have you kissed your husband in the past month?



**Q.** Do you think you will have sex with your husband in the future?



## We talked to a postpartum healthcare trainer Kanako Nakai from MadreBonita, who has interacted with many postpartum women and is working with issues surrounding marital relationships.

**N**eedless to say, communication is a key factor when considering postpartum marital relationships. As for verbal communication, our survey shows that more than half of postpartum women feel like they are spending less time talking with their spouses (since childbirth), and "want to talk more!" On the other hand, when we consider a couple's sex life, which is a form of non-verbal communication, there seems to be a gap between women, who stop wanting to have a sex due to their temporarily lowered sex drive after childbirth, and men, who have the same physiological drives

even after the baby is born. And it seems that this gap may be caused not only by such physical differences, but also by the couple's lack of communication during the day. Wives may be increasingly frustrated with their husbands without being aware of it, but at the same time, husbands may feel like they are not able to keep up with their wives' lives, which have drastically changed to be centered around their children... In order to have fulfilling conversations even for a short time, and in order to be able to say no to sex without hurting your husband's pride during your life with a baby, it's necessary to be considerate

and respectful of your partner. Everything begins when you are flexible and give yourself some extra space. With decreased physical strength, it's easy for women to fall into having a narrower outlook on life and to lose their ability to imagine what things are like for others during the postpartum period. So we strongly recommend that postpartum women make a daily effort to give themselves some extra space by, for example, doing exercises, or organizing their thoughts by writing down their feelings, etc.

**Q.** Frankly, has the word "divorce" ever crossed your mind after childbirth?



### Ms. Kanako Nakai

Born August 19, 1976. Lives in Haeburu, Okinawa prefecture. Graduated from the Department of Liberal Arts at the International Christian University majoring in International Relations. Has taught postpartum exercises and self-care to about 250 women as a postpartum healthcare trainer at MadreBonita. Mother of two children, ages 5 and 1.

**Part 3** Survey on a postpartum healthcare program

# MadreBonita's postpartum healthcare

According to the surveys so far, we have found that many postpartum women share common problems, such as mental and physical issues after childbirth, and confusion or discontent with changes in their marital relationships. Even before conducting these surveys mentioned above, MadreBonita was already aware of the real problems faced by postpartum women. MadreBonita has developed and promoted a holistic healthcare program in order to solve such problems, and to help women obtain a healthy mind and body, and positive marital relationships. The 620 women who participated in this survey are also former participants of MadreBonita's program. After the program, we asked the participants how effective the program was, and how well they were satisfied with it.

## What exactly is MadreBonita's postpartum healthcare program?

The program consists of four, 120-minute sessions. Each session consists of the three main pillars that are essential for postpartum women.



1 Aerobic exercises using exercise balls



2 Self-expression and communication training (for activating the brain)

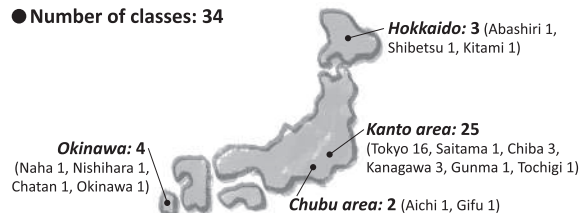


3 Obtaining knowledge about and learning the techniques of self-care

Through the four sessions, participants naturally recover their physical strength, obtain more beautiful body shapes, and improve their physical ability. The lessons are also designed to cultivate the participants' self-expression, communication skills, and zest for life.

## Class Information as of September 2012

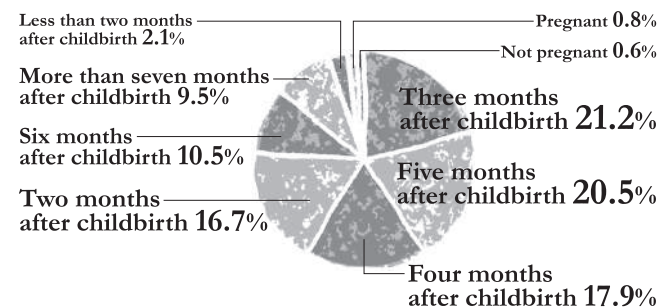
### ● Number of classes: 34



### ● Target group: Postpartum women between two and six months after childbirth

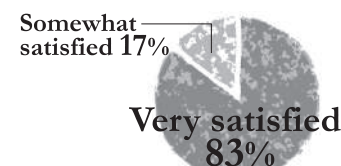
**Note:**  
With consideration for the safety of the babies, members who have a child over seven months old are required to leave him/her in the care of someone reliable and participate in the session alone.

## Breakdown of participants' backgrounds



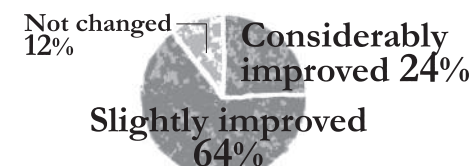
Note: n=1248 (all participants from October 2009 to September 2010)  
Survey conducted by NPO MadreBonita

## Q. How did you like the program?



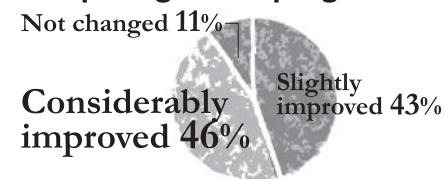
Most participants are satisfied with the program.

## Q. Have your physical problems improved since you took part in the program?



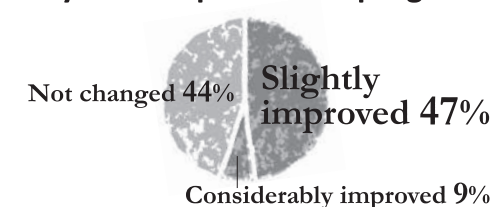
More than 80% of the participants experienced improvements with their physical problems.

## Q. Has your mental status improved after participating in the program?



More than 80% of the participants answered that they have felt the program's effect on mental status.

## Q. Has your relationship with your husband improved since you took part in the program?



More than half of participants feel that their relationship with their husbands has become better.

The participant satisfaction survey was done on a four-point scale: "Very satisfied," "Somewhat satisfied," "Neutral," and "Dissatisfied." All respondents chose the top two, which shows that their level of satisfaction with the program was very high. In order to find out the reasons for this, we asked if there had been any changes in participants' physical problems, mental status, and marital relationships. More than half of those surveyed answered that they had "improved" in all of these three categories. For concrete examples of such changes, please see the next page.

# This program brought about such big changes!

We gathered the opinions of the participants in MadreBonita's postpartum healthcare program.



“The program stopped me from getting a divorce!”

— 33 y/o, 4 months after childbirth

**Before:** ▶ ▶ ▶

Since my husband's extravagant spending habits hadn't improved, I thought I could no longer continue childrearing with him and had talked to my mother about our divorce.

**After:**

I've come to think positively about my husband and we are trying to make our own rules. The word "divorce" has disappeared from my mind.

“I started to enjoy going out and taking care of my body!”

— 42 y/o, 2 months after childbirth

**Before:** ▶ ▶ ▶

I had tended to stay at home. I had been depressed due to pains in my neck, back, and lower back as well as because of my tinnitus (ringing of the ears).

**After:**

I started to enjoy going out with my child. I realized the importance of my health and began to pay attention to self-care.

“Stress-induced overeating has stopped!”

— 31 y/o, 4 months after childbirth

**Before:** ▶ ▶ ▶

I was stressed out due to my trouble sleeping and the fact that I couldn't do housework. I bought sweets like ice cream and cake, and had been binge eating.

**After:**

I have started to want sweets less even though I craved them so much before. My overeating has completely stopped.

“I've got in shape and now I hardly get tired!”

— 30 y/o, 3 months after childbirth

**Before:** ▶ ▶ ▶

I had severe lower back pain, just like older women have. Since I easily got tired whenever I did anything, it was hard for me to complete the housework.

**After:**

Through the program, I got in better shape. Now I hardly become tired even when I do housework. Since my lower back pain has lessened, having sex no longer bothers me.

“I started to get motivated!”

— 33 y/o, 4 months after childbirth

**Before:** ▶ ▶ ▶

I wasn't able to get motivated. I hesitated before doing anything even if I had interest in it...

**After:**

I began to feel motivated again by talking about my personal future in class.

“My pelvis has become narrower and I'm more positive now!”

— 37 y/o, 5 months after childbirth

**Before:** ▶ ▶ ▶

My mind and body were in bad condition and I hadn't been able to take action for myself. I'd been feeling bored with the days alone with my baby and wanted to talk with an adult.

**After:**

My pelvis has become narrower, and I can fit into my pre-pregnancy pants now. I have become mentally positive and open-minded.

“The way I talk to my husband has changed!”

— 28 y/o, 5 months after childbirth

**Before:** ▶ ▶ ▶

I had been annoyed with my husband because he didn't help me out, had lost my physical strength, and was feeling anxious about bringing up two boys.

**After:**

I have been able to tell my husband what I want him to do with words instead of just showing him through my attitude. I realized that I'm able to improve my physical strength if I put in the effort.

“I realized how important my husband is to me. I get angry with him less!”

— 34 y/o, 6 months after childbirth

**Before:** ▶ ▶ ▶

I often had fights with my husband. I was angry with him because he put priority on spending time on his hobby rather than taking care of the oldest child, even while I was having a hard time with our newborn.

**After:**

I realized that I cared about (or wanted to care about) my husband. I still sometimes get annoyed by him, but my desire to care for my husband makes me less angry.

“I used to feel a lack of freedom, but now I'm much more energetic!”

— 30 y/o, 4 months after childbirth

**Before:** ▶ ▶ ▶

I used to wake up late and hardly ever went out with my baby. I had been feeling a lack of freedom to the point of feeling depressed, and some days I couldn't even manage a smile. I felt frustration building towards my partner.

**After:**

Now I can't stop myself from wanting to go outside! There are many things I want to do even when I'm at home. As for housework, I do what I can do, and if there's too much, I now feel comfortable with asking my husband to help out.

## Special Report 3

# How does the husband see his wife after childbirth?

A husband's support is indispensable in getting through pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period.

We surveyed men who were able to observe their postpartum wives firsthand.

(16 men were surveyed, all of whom are husbands of the project staff or husbands of MadreBonita trainers.)

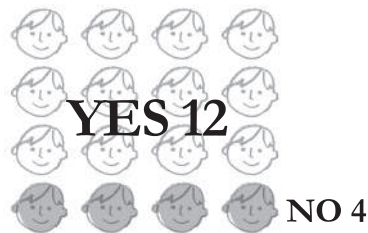
## Q. Has your wife changed after childbirth?



### How, specifically?

- She became mentally stronger.
- Her way of thinking became child-centric.
- She doesn't pay much attention to me.
- We hardly have any spare time.
- We have sex less frequently.
- Her body shape has changed a little.
- ...etc.

## Q. Have you changed after childbirth?



### How, specifically?

- I come home earlier than before.
- I have more responsibilities.
- I don't have time to relax at home.
- I don't want to do overtime work like before.
- I started doing more housework than before.

### It's not only the wives who have changed.

We asked the husbands about the changes they saw in their wives after childbirth, and the changes they saw in themselves respectively.

Although it was a vague question, 75% of them answered that not only their wives, but they too have also changed. We can see from this result that childbirth affects both wives and husbands. On the following page are

some messages that the husbands want to share with men who will soon be going through their wives' postpartum period. We hope these messages will be helpful for you and your partner.

## Q. What was difficult or hard for you?

### "Being patient when my wife got annoyed..."

I tried not to talk back to my wife after childbirth, because I knew that it wouldn't help anything and that the situation might get even worse.

### "Unable to make time for myself..."

I know that my wife was having a hard time making time for herself, but sometimes, we only ended up boasting to each other about how hard we were working.

### "I didn't have enough knowledge..."

Because my wife gave birth at home, it was hard for me to do everything what midwives or the staff of a hospital would usually do because I didn't have enough knowledge.

### "My wife suffered from postpartum depression after her second childbirth..."

My oldest child showed signs of regression while we were busy caring for the new baby. I think it was mentally and physically too hard for my wife. I panicked since I couldn't judge how serious the situation was.

### "It was hard to see my wife in pain..."

My wife had trouble breastfeeding and it was hard to see her in pain.

### "Fathers are no match for mothers..."

Until I was able to think this way, that fathers are no match for mothers, I had been struggling with feelings of frustration about how I couldn't do anything when faced with a crying baby. I came to enjoy childrearing after I understood that the best thing to do is to fulfill my own role rather than trying to do the same thing as mothers.

### "Why did she complain even though I was helping?!"

My wife complained to me even after I helped her. Sometimes I suffered from lack of sleep when I had trouble putting our child to bed. She also grumbled to me when I came home late. It made me feel bad because I wasn't out fooling around. I was actually working. Later she said she just wanted me to help her out, and I found it was just a matter of how she said things.

### "Basically, nothing."

Of course I always get worried when my children become sick, are injured, when I get a call from the childcare, and so on. However, I never feel like it's difficult or hard for me. I can do general housework and didn't have any problems even right after childbirth.

## Is there anything you would like to say to husbands who are about to face their wives' postpartum period?

Keep making constant efforts to love your wife and to be loved by your wife!

Try to connect with other families too!

Give selfless love not only to your child, but to your wife too!

Pushing yourself too hard can make you exhausted. Keep being yourself!

Unimaginable happiness awaits you!

Have sufficient communication with your wife.

You can establish your own style of childrearing!

The birth of a child is a symbol of happiness.  
But in reality...?

### Everyone should be aware of the reality faced by postpartum women.

Many postpartum women are faced by a stark reality. They are completely constrained by childrearing. They are confused by the gap between how happy they imagined life would be before childbirth and the savage reality at hand. They have physical problems that they have never experienced before. They feel confused and hazy.

There are several things that postpartum women who cannot adapt to such realities have in common: they have the strong feeling that they are being victimized; they fight with their husbands, who actually want to cooperate; and they are faced by an emotional gulf between them and their husbands.

If women don't take care of such problems, the situation might not only affect childrearing, but also lead to family crises in which the wife stops asking for help from her husband. Partners must take constructive efforts to live happy lives as a family.

However, immediately after finishing a job as big as giving birth, the body and mind remain unstable. So it is not difficult to imagine that parents have trouble keeping themselves sane in this unique situation of non-stop caregiving.



### For the sake of the babies - they are the treasure of the society in the future.

Until now, the worries of postpartum women have been regarded as simply matters of personal value, and dealt with as private issues. But is it ok to overlook these matters? We think it is not possible to deal with these problems through individual efforts alone, especially during the unstable stage right after childbirth.

The healthiness of a mother is a matter of life and death for babies. If we could think as an entire society about how to support mothers without dismissing their problems as merely personal or family issues, how encouraging would it be for all postpartum women!

It may be a bit harsh to expect women who are still dreamy to face the following three cases. However, these cases more or less reflect the real experiences of many postpartum women. We would be happy if you could take this opportunity to think about what you will need after childbirth, what kind of support you will need, and how you will prepare yourself for the postpartum period, while trying not to look away from these issues.



## Interviews vol.1

The not-so-rosy realities after childbirth:  
it was not supposed to be like this!

## In the days after I had my second child, getting a divorce crossed my mind many times.



Mrs. A (30 y/o), Tokyo  
Family: husband, son (4 y/o),  
and daughter (6 months)

We used to be so in love before the babies were born...  
Even now my husband and I still do not understand  
each other.

### The distance between my husband and I has been growing since our first baby was born.

I started dating my husband when I was in college, and I married him at the age of 23. I gave birth to our first child at 25. Since then my relationship with my husband started to become strained.

I was tied up with taking care of my child and had no spare time. My husband, on the other hand, frequently went to drink after work like he used to before the baby was born, saying that he needed time to relax because he was stressed out by work. We had serious quarrels repeatedly almost every week, and I began to

get more and more frustrated with my husband.

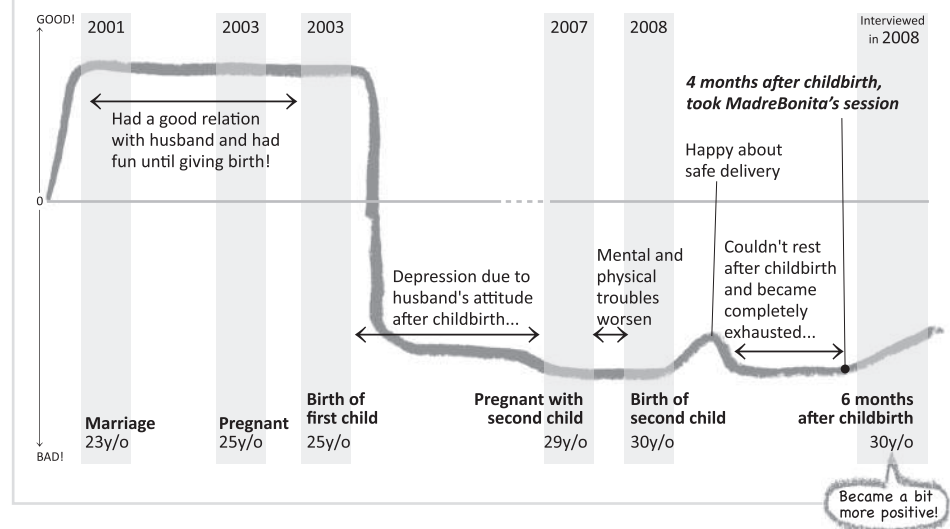
My husband says he loves the children, but he takes care of them only when he feels like it. I'm worried that he assumes bringing up the baby is only my responsibility. Even when I said, "It's tough. Please help me," he answered, "If you don't like taking care of the baby yourself, you can take her to an orphanage." I will never forget one word of what he said then.

### Unwilling pregnancy of the second child

Personally, I didn't want another child. To tell you the truth, the oldest child was always extremely active. The

kindergarten teacher even told me that he might have hyperactive tendencies. I was mentally and physically exhausted from daily childrearing. Since I was suffering from severe insomnia, I went to the doctor to get a prescription for sleeping pills. As a matter of fact, I was so tired once that I reluctantly had sex rather than resisting. He didn't use a condom. I got pregnant by having sex that one time, and I had to stop taking sleeping pills. Due to my lack of sleep, I felt dizzy all the time during pregnancy. With these kinds of problems to deal with, I had too much on my mind to think about building a better relationship with my husband.

### Mrs. A's "Before and After" Biorhythm Chart



### My husband took paternity leave, but my pent-up discontent still remained

Around that time he changed departments at work and had to take on a lot of tasks that he didn't want. It seemed really hard for him, and he could hardly take any time off. It was then that he suddenly said, "I'll take childcare leave." Since he had always said things that made him seem like he looked down on housework and childrearing, I just answered, "I dare you!" Eventually, my husband took eight weeks of childcare leave. However, the things that he did frequently frustrated me in my postpartum state. For

example, he said that he could cook rice and vegetables but not main dishes, that he could give the baby a bath but wouldn't prepare a change of clothes or dress the baby, and so on. So I had to run around just after returning home from the hospital and couldn't rest well after all. I depended only on my husband and that was a mistake.

### Divorce is the last resort. Now I want to take a step forward.

One of the reasons why our relationship became so exacerbated might have been the isolated circumstances of my childrearing. It always seemed that every mother I

saw on the street or in magazines was enjoying childrearing with her well-behaved child and gentle husband. By attending MadreBonita's sessions, I realized that this is not always the case.

I have thought about divorce many times, and I have reserved it as the last resort. I'm also thinking about whether to start working or to stay at home while my husband is working long hours. I'm going to take a step forward from this isolated childrearing by looking into childcare.

## Interviews vol.2

The not-so-rosy realities after childbirth:  
it was not supposed to be like this!

**My husband cooperated with me after childbirth, though we had had big fights before.**



Mrs. B (40 y/o), Tokyo,  
living with husband,  
son (4 months)

Our long-awaited child that I had thanks to fertility treatment is dearer to me than my husband?!  
I was diagnosed with uterine prolapse and chose to attend MadreBonita's sessions.

### Living abroad and returning to Japan. Getting pregnant was hard.

When I was 32 years old, I got married to my husband who is four years younger than me. At the same time, my husband was assigned to an overseas post and we started our newly married life in a foreign country with a maid, a cook, and a driver.

Even though we had planned to have a baby right away when we returned to Japan after living abroad for three and a half years, it was not so easy to get pregnant. After coming back to Japan, my husband came home later than

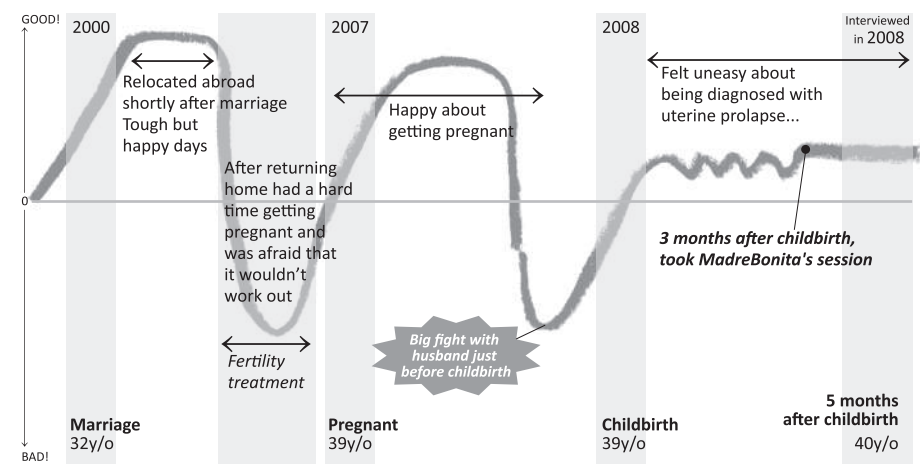
when we were abroad. It caused me to have outbursts of anger because I kept thinking about how I had tried really hard to adapt to the unfamiliar life overseas. I started fertility treatment two or three years after coming back to Japan. Since I went to the hospital by myself, my husband had no chance to know how hard the treatment was, which became a source of my frustration.

### We had a big fight just before giving birth! What was the cause?

It was hard receiving fertility treatment because I didn't know how it would turn out,

but fortunately I got pregnant within two years. However, I had a big fight again with my husband just before giving birth. The reason was that he was looking at porn sites. I could hardly contain my anger because I had been so nervous during pregnancy. In addition to that, as my husband's parents were not getting along, I always had to be very careful about what to do or say to them, and I was also frustrated with my husband's attitude toward them. Also, for example, he didn't refuse their dinner invitations even when I was feeling sick from fertility treatment. Many things like that made me think that I might get a divorce.

### Mrs. B's "Before and After" Biorhythm Chart



### I love my child more than I love my husband. Can we ever get back to being 'man and woman'?

My husband finally seemed to realize how hard it had been for me after he witnessed the delivery. We talked to each other a lot after that, and he became very cooperative. He basically likes to cook. It was quite helpful that on weekdays in my postpartum period he prepared my meals ahead of time. I think it's partially because he was feeling bad about the fight we had before the baby was born. But to be honest, I have to admit that I put my son before my husband right now. Since my husband also takes good care of our son, we are

getting along well so far. But I have a slight worry that we may never be able to get back to having a "man and woman" kind of relationship.

### Physical problem after childbirth. How to treat uterine prolapse?

I had a difficult delivery because my son had a large head, and I suffered from uterine prolapse after childbirth. When I saw my doctor, he just said, "It'll be fine someday." From the way he said it, I felt as if he was trying to say, "You delivered safely. What else do you need?" The midwife recommended doing exercises to tighten the vagina, but I couldn't make

time to do them since I was tied up with everyday childrearing. Even now, four months after childbirth, I still feel discomfort. I wondered whether or not the uterine prolapse really would get better with time, and if not, what would actually happen.

### First, improve muscle strength to prevent uterine prolapse!

Around then I got information about MadreBonita. I decided to strengthen support for my uterus by exercising the Kegel muscle (pelvic floor muscle) at MadreBonita's sessions. It was also nice that you can attend the sessions with babies. I am looking forward to the effects!

## Interviews vol.3

The not-so-rosy realities after childbirth:  
it was not supposed to be like this!

## Childbirth is not the goal, but rather the beginning.



Mrs. C (23 y/o), Tokyo,  
planning on moving to Hokkaido  
Family: husband, son (1 y/o)

I had been irritated after childbirth and fought with my husband more frequently. Now, one year later, we are facing a new stage.

**I received little support in my postpartum life. Almost all of my friends were single.**

It took 20 hours from the beginning of regular contractions till I delivered. My husband attended the moment of the delivery, and when I gave birth, I felt like I had finally done it. I was filled with a sense of accomplishment. But after a while, I found that, "It was not the goal, but rather the beginning."

I was 21 years old when I got married and 22 when I gave birth, so most of my friends were not married yet. My mother had already passed away, so there was hardly

anyone to support my postpartum life. My mother-in-law stayed with me to help for one week after leaving the hospital. But I hesitated to ask her for favors and always told her that I was all right. So, I returned to daily life without getting much rest.

**The way I walked was strange because of my loose pelvis!**

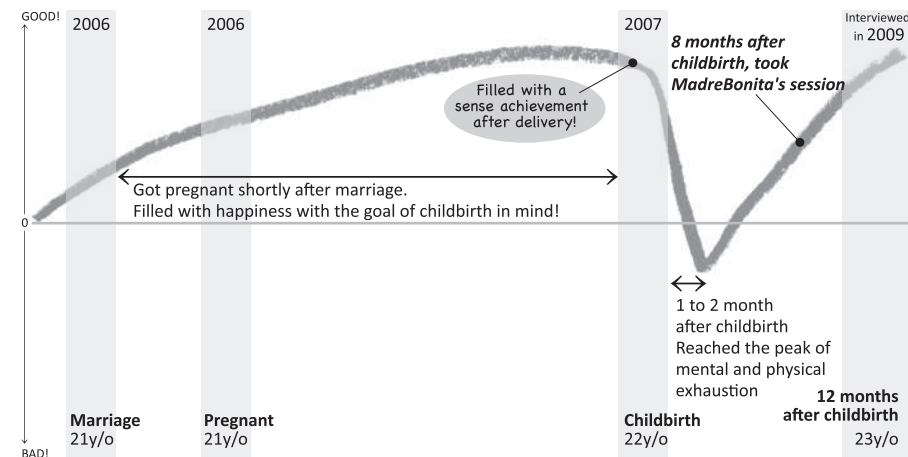
When I finished the one-month postpartum checkup, I was ready to restart my ordinary life. But my body just couldn't keep up. I was walking oddly and feeling that my pelvis was unstable. My hemorrhoids were also getting worse and worse. Back then I

wasn't yet aware of my mental poor mental condition. Now that I'm recovered, I can see that my bad physical condition did affect my mental state at that time. It was not until my physical condition got better by attending MadreBonita's sessions that I got some breathing room back.

**We tried to find ways to make up even though we had quarrels.**

My husband and I came to quarrel more frequently after the baby was born, possibly because of my continually nervous mental state. The quarrels were sometimes about something as trivial as

### Mrs. C's "Before and After" Biorhythm Chart



his leaving his socks on the floor after taking them off. But it was not only about the socks. It was a result of everything before that just building up. However, from his point of view, he might not have understood why I got so angry about a pair of socks. He might have understood if I had taken the time to explain everything that I was feeling up till then, but I didn't want to take the time to have a real quarrel with him because I had other work at hand, that is, taking care of our child all day and night. My mind was full of relationship issues, children issues, and my personal issues, so I had arrived at a place where I couldn't even express what I

wanted to say.

However, the chasm between us didn't become fatal because my husband kept showing his will to make up with me even when we were quarreling. For instance, when he got irritated, he would go out of the house to cool off and come back after calming down. This kind of effort from his side helped me.

**Our son gave us a chance to start a new life.**

Actually, we are close to a career change for my husband and us moving to a new home. Since he was not very happy about his last job, he decided to take the plunge and take

over the family business of farming. Though we had quarrels while discussing the subject, now my husband has been relieved from the stress from his last job and we are feeling hopeful about our new life.

Our son means a lot. Without him, we might have never thought about becoming farmers.

This first year after childbirth was hard for us, but now I am feeling so grateful for the existence of our child.

## Upon completion of "A Study on Postpartum Life"

Thank you very much for picking this booklet up.

How did you feel about the reality of postpartum life in Japan? Japan has low rates of infant mortality and maternal mortality, and is seen as having excellent maternal and child healthcare. Still, we have found an important blind spot in this category.

What is in the blind spot? It is the healthcare for women after childbirth.

In Japan, when a woman becomes pregnant, she will be given a Maternal and Child Healthcare handbook<sup>6</sup> and will be well protected by the government until her delivery. However, once she gives birth to a baby, public healthcare and medical services change the object of their concern from her to her baby. As for the mother's health of mind and of body, neither medical nor public services are able to provide enough care. So MadreBonita broke into this hitherto undeveloped field of healthcare for postpartum women, and has been deploying a holistic health care program since 1998. From that time on, we have worked to promote our program. While providing the program, we have improved its quality through watching thousands of postpartum women, and have fostered MadreBonita certified trainers.

Participants gave us testimonials such as, "This is just what I need now," and, "More and more mothers and families would become happy if this program spread." We came to keenly realize that healthcare for postpartum women should be equally provided to all mothers, just like the Maternal and Child Healthcare handbook, instead of being something of luxury that only a limited number of people can enjoy.

If we truly wish for the healthy growth of all children, we must change the maternal and child health systems in Japan so that healthcare for all *mothers* becomes completely covered by public expenses. I believe that this would also contribute to halting the declining birthrate in Japan.

However, this sensation had simply been based on our own subjective feelings. We had been feeling chagrined since we often failed to make people understand, no matter how hard we tried to explain the situation. Therefore, we decided to make a compilation of objective data that would depict the reality of the postpartum women whom we trainers meet in sessions every day. Hence, A Study on Postpartum Life Project was launched. There were many people who were willing to collaborate when we asked for volunteers for this project among the members of the Nonprofit Organization MadreBonita. In addition, thanks to all the motivated staff and their unbelievable teamwork, we were able to gather real opinions from 620 postpartum women.

I'm glad to be able to publish A Study on Postpartum Life, which represents the opinions of postpartum women who are tied up with caring for their newborn babies and cannot make their voices heard so easily. I hope this booklet will help promote a public understanding of the reality of postpartum life and enhance maternal and child care, so that all mothers will someday be provided with postpartum care.

Mar. 31, 2009

**Maco Yoshioka, Executive Director of MadreBonita**

**Notes**

1

An episiotomy is a surgical procedure in which an incision is made on the perineum and the vaginal wall during labor. Such incision are intended to prevent vaginal tearing during childbirth, and are sutured closed after delivery. (p.9)

2

There is a custom called Satogaeri in Japan, in which a pregnant woman returns to her parents' home after childbirth. She stays there from one month before her due date till one to two months after childbirth in order to receive support from her parents.

In Japan, the paternalistic family system known as ie (household) has long been considered to be the basic unit of society, and marriage has meant a new bond between two families. Satogaeri was not only helpful for a married woman who dedicated her life to her husband's family, but was also useful in reinforcing the ties to her family. (p.10)

3

There are three types of childcare centers in Japan: Ninka (government-approved), Ninsho (municipally-approved) and Ninka-gai (non-approved). Ninka childcare centers are centers that the governor of each prefecture approves based on the Japanese governmental standards for floor space, equipment, management conditions, number of staff, and so on. However, in some metropolises such as Tokyo, Ninka childcare centers are quite difficult to find due to the strict establishment standards, and there are too few to cover the needs of the citizens. In response to this, local governments set their own establishment standards to approve childcare centers independently (Ninsho childcare).

The childcare fee of Ninka centers depends on one's household income. On the other hand, since the fees at Ninsho and Ninka-gai centers are flat regardless of income, the parents' economic burden at these centers tends to be greater.

Chronic shortage of childcare centers has been pointed out as a problem in Japan. Since this situation prevents mothers from returning to work, effective governmental efforts are seriously required. (p.13)

4

According to a survey conducted in 41 countries by Durex (US) in 2005, the frequency of sexual intercourse in Japan was 45 times per year on average, which was the lowest out of all countries surveyed. (p.18)

**Notes**

5

Co-sleeping with a baby, or sleeping alongside a baby, is the most common practice in Japan. Some parents think co-sleeping is a preparation for the baby to sleep alone when grown up, while in many families even children old enough to go to school still sleep in the same room as their parents. This is due to the Japanese living environment of small housing spaces, as well as the Japanese cultural background, in which children are considered the heart of the home. (p.19)

6

The Maternal and Child Healthcare Handbook is a small notebook used to record information about a mothers' health such as the progress during pregnancy and the status of delivery, as well as information on the child's condition from birth till school attendance, and the vaccination record. This notebook is provided to all pregnant women in Japan by local municipalities under the Maternal and Child Health Act. to work, effective governmental efforts are seriously required. (p.36)

**What is MadreBonita?**

MadreBonita is dedicated to developing and providing a holistic fitness program specially designed for women after childbirth to support their mental and physical well-being through the stages of pregnancy, childbirth, and postnatal care. A Study on Postpartum Life was written by volunteer staff who wished to inform the public of the reality of the postpartum body and mind. It has been covered widely by media such as TV news and newspapers, and has caused significant social impact.

<http://www.facebook.com/madrebonitaJP>

## ***A Study on Postpartum Life***

---

**Production Team** Kanako Ito / Reiko Okada / Ayako Gaku / Tomomi Kasuya  
Chisato Kitazawa / Miho Kuroda / Saiko Sakurai / Aya Tanaka  
Rie Tanifuji / Yuko Tsuji / Masako Nakagiri / Naoko Noguchi  
Kaori Noda / Maki Hanada / Mariko Hara / Tomoko Higaki  
Yuka Makiuchi / Chiaki Yamada / Fukuko Yoshimori

**Editorial Supervisor** Maco Yoshioka

**Contributors** Shoko Sou (President of Matsugaoka Birth Center)  
Kanako Nakai (MadreBonita postpartum healthcare trainer)

**Design and Illustration** Riwa Fujiwara

**Translation** Kumiko Akutsu / Tomoko Araki / Hiroko Ikeda  
Kasumi Ushida / Makiko Urabe / Naoko Ogawa  
Daisuke Kitazawa / Chisato Kitazawa / Sadako Kubota  
Yoko Sonobe / Chigusa Suzuki / Chie Takemura  
Kanako Nakai / Yuko Nagoshi / Emiko Hata  
Tomoko Miura Scutariu / Satsuki Yokoro

**Proofreading** Chie Aikawa  
Josh Rogers

**We would like to thank:** All staff members of NPO MadreBonita  
Social Venture Partners Tokyo  
Participants of the Postpartum Healthcare and Fitness Program who  
have kindly responded to the questionnaire  
Spouses of MadreBonita's staff members who have answered the  
questionnaire for male partners

### ***A Study on Postpartum Life***

A Report on the Postpartum Body and Mind Physical  
Conditions and Marital Relationships Immediately  
After Childbirth

**Published in 2012 by NPO MadreBonita**

Originally published in Japan in 2009

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form  
without the prior permission of the publisher.