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## Power of placenta

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**Abstract (Abstract):** More accurately, [Lisa Southworth] swallowed capsules containing her dehydrated placenta. The practice is called placenta encapsulation. And while it's far from mainstream, it is gaining popularity across the country, including in the Portland-Vancouver area, said [Raeben Nolan], birth doula and owner of Tree of Life Placenta Services in Portland.

Nolan provides a range of services for her clients. Most women request placenta encapsulation, which requires the cleaning, steaming, dehydrating and grinding of the placenta before it's put into capsules that look no different than most vitamins. She also uses the placenta to make healing herbal oils or keepsakes such as placenta prints. Nolan can also prepare the placenta in a meal; however, she's never had a client request the service.

"When I started doing this five years ago, not many people had heard of it. It was really out there," Nolan said. "It's still not mainstream, but it's not just crunchy home-birth moms."

**Links:** [Linking Service](#)

**Full text:** Courtesy of Raeben Nolan

Raeben Nolan's Portland-based business, Tree of Life Placenta Services, makes placenta capsules for mothers in the metro area. The placenta, a temporary organ that links a fetus to the uterus, is cleaned, steamed, dehydrated and ground before its put into capsules.

Courtesy of Raeben Nolan

Tree of Life Placenta Services uses placentas to create capsules, healing herbal oils and keepsakes such as prints and umbilical hearts.

Lisa Southworth, 34, had her placenta encapsulated after delivering her son, Benjamin, in 2007. She took the pills daily for about a month and said she experienced increased energy levels and healed faster than she did with her first child.

Courtesy of Lisa Southworth

After giving birth to her first child in 2004, Lisa Southworth experienced awful postpartum depression.

The former Vancouver woman was willing to try anything to avoid a similar experience when she delivered her second child in 2007.

Including eating her placenta.

"I know it sounds wacky," the 34-year-old said. "It's kind of strange and weird, but I'd do it again."

More accurately, Southworth swallowed capsules containing her dehydrated placenta. The practice is called placenta encapsulation. And while it's far from mainstream, it is gaining popularity across the country, including in the Portland-Vancouver area, said Raeben Nolan, birth doula and owner of Tree of Life Placenta Services in Portland.

Nolan provides a range of services for her clients. Most women request placenta encapsulation, which requires the cleaning, steaming, dehydrating and grinding of the placenta before it's put into capsules that look no different than most vitamins. She also uses the placenta to make healing herbal oils or keepsakes such as placenta prints. Nolan can also prepare the placenta in a meal; however, she's never had a client request the service.

"When I started doing this five years ago, not many people had heard of it. It was really out there," Nolan said.

"It's still not mainstream, but it's not just crunchy home-birth moms."

In fact, Nolan said, a majority of her clients deliver their children in hospitals.

On average, one woman a month who delivers at Legacy Salmon Creek Medical Center asks to take her placenta home, hospital spokesman Brian Willoughby said. As long as the placenta isn't contaminated or otherwise unhealthy, the patients are allowed to take their placenta home with them, he said.

PeaceHealth Southwest Medical Center has a similar policy.

Placenta consumption has been going on for decades, Nolan said. Nearly all land mammals, including herbivores like deer, consume their placentas after birth. In China, mothers will often prepare postpartum soup using their placenta. And in Vietnam, animal placentas can be purchased for consumption at markets, Nolan said.

The placenta is a temporary organ that attaches to the inside of the uterus and is connected to the baby by the umbilical cord. The placenta transfers oxygen-rich blood and nutrients from the mother to the baby.

While there hasn't been much medical research on the benefits of humans consuming placentas, Nolan said women often say ingesting the organ helped stave off the baby blues and postpartum depression.

The placenta is loaded with the hormones and nutrients -- such as iron, calcium and zinc -- needed to develop a healthy baby. When the placenta is delivered, the woman loses all of those hormones and nutrients, Nolan said.

Taking placenta capsules is one way to restore what is lost, she said.

Mothers take a couple of pills three times a day for about a month after delivery. Then, they can taper the dose and take them only as needed, Nolan said.

Some studies also found placenta consumption helps with lactation and helps the uterus to heal more quickly, Nolan said.

Despite the purported benefits, placenta capsules aren't a cure-all medicine, Nolan said; they're more of an herbal remedy.

Dr. Leo Pereira, head of maternal-fetal medicine at Oregon Health & Science University, said while there are compelling reasons for animals to eat their placentas, the same isn't true for humans.

Animals are believed to eat their placentas for the nutritional value, namely for the iron. Humans, however, can take iron supplements or restore iron levels through diet, Pereira said.

Studies in rats have shown the placenta is also effective in blocking pain receptors, so animals eat the organ for pain control. Humans have medications for pain control, Pereira said.

As for the placenta's helping curb postpartum depression, Pereira said no medical evidence to support the claim exists.

"It's not a practice I ever suggest to anybody," he said. "There's no medical data to support advocating people do it."

Pereira worries women won't seek proven treatments for depression because they'll believe the placenta capsules will solve the problem. Another potential risk is illness from bacteria in the placenta, should it not be properly prepared, Pereira said.

While there may not be medical evidence to prove placenta consumption can help with the baby blues, Southworth said her personal experience convinced her the pills work. She healed faster, had more energy and felt more in control of her emotions.

"Those little miracle capsules, they definitely helped," the Seattle resident said. "Even if it was a placebo effect, I would still do it again."

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