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The Sun Pillar: Light as Medicine from Conception to Recovery

I'm going to tell you something that might sound too simple to be true: Your body is designed to heal in the light. Not under fluorescent bulbs. Not scrolling your phone at 2 a.m. while nursing. Not inside four walls, wondering why you feel disconnected, depleted, and like your core will never feel whole again. In the light. Outside. Under the sun.

This isn't wellness theater. This is biology. And it's one of the most powerful—and most ignored—tools in your postpartum recovery toolkit.

But here's what most women don't know: This healing begins long before birth. Your baby's first experience of light, rhythm, and cellular programming happens in utero—through your belly, through amniotic fluid, through the choices you make about where you spend your days.

Why We Forgot About Light

Somewhere along the way, we started treating postpartum recovery like a checklist. Do your kegels. Wear the wrap. Get cleared at six weeks. Move on. But your body doesn't work on a timeline. It works on signals. And one of the most critical signals your body needs to heal, regulate, and rebuild? Light.

Your circadian rhythm—the internal clock that governs hormone production, cellular repair, inflammation response, and metabolic function—is controlled by a tiny cluster of neurons in your brain called the suprachiasmatic nucleus (SCN). The SCN is your body's master clock. It sits just above the optic nerve, and it's set by one thing: light entering your eyes.

When light hits your retina in the morning, it sends signals to the SCN, which then coordinates every clock in your body—your liver, your gut, your adrenal glands, your ovaries, your immune system. These clocks govern when you sleep, when you wake, when you produce certain hormones, when you repair tissue, when you digest food.

When you disrupt that rhythm—by staying inside all day, exposing yourself to artificial light at night, or never seeing sunrise—you disrupt everything downstream.

And yet, we bring women home from birth and tell them to rest inside. In the dark. Away from natural light cycles. Then we wonder why they can't sleep when the baby sleeps, why their mood crashes at 3 p.m., why their bodies feel stuck in survival mode for months postpartum.

What Happens in Pregnancy: Light Before Birth

Here's what changed everything for me: understanding that pregnant women entrain for two. When you're pregnant, you're not just regulating your own circadian rhythm. You're setting your baby's. Hormonally. Metabolically. Circadianly. Your light environment directly shapes the developmental timing, metabolism, and mitochondrial health of your baby. And it starts earlier than you think.

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Amniotic fluid loves to absorb near-infrared light. A 2010 study on the optical properties of human amniotic fluid found something remarkable: Amniotic fluid selectively transmits red and near-infrared light, with peak transmission at 850nm—the exact wavelength abundant in morning and evening sunlight. These are the same wavelengths that power mitochondrial energy production and cellular development.

But here's the critical part: **As pregnancy progresses, light transmission drops.** Amniotic fluid becomes more optically dense in later gestation, meaning less light passes through. Early and mid-pregnancy sun exposure matters most. Mitochondria are your baby's first clocks. Red and near-infrared light activate cytochrome c oxidase (Complex IV in the mitochondrial electron transport chain), which drives ATP production—the energy currency of every cell. Maternal sunlight exposure tunes fetal mitochondrial biogenesis through light that penetrates the amniotic fluid and reaches your baby.

This isn't just about vitamin D. This is about full-spectrum photon exposure as the most powerful form of prenatal development and programming. Circadian signaling starts before birth. Your baby is learning rhythm, learning light and dark, learning when to be awake and when to rest—all while still inside you. And the signal comes from your exposure to natural light.

Only recently in human history have we created environments where a pregnant woman may not step outside all day. Where she never exposes her belly to the sun for nine months. Where she lives under artificial light from morning to night.

Get outside pregnant. Not as a luxury. As a biological imperative.

What the Sun Actually Does for Your Body Postpartum

Let's get specific. Because I'm not here to tell you sunlight is "nice." I'm here to show you why it's essential.

Morning light resets your circadian rhythm.

Within 30 minutes of waking, exposure to natural light—even through cloud cover—signals your SCN to produce cortisol (the hormone that helps you feel awake and alert) and suppresses melatonin. This isn't just about feeling more energized. It sets the stage for your body to produce melatonin at the right time later that night, which governs your sleep quality, immune function, and cellular repair.

Without that morning light signal, your SCN doesn't know what time it is. Your body can't properly time hormone release, tissue repair, or metabolic function. You end up tired during the day and wired at night—stuck in a dysregulated loop.

Red and near-infrared wavelengths heal tissue.

Morning and evening sunlight are rich in red (630-680nm) and near-infrared (750-850nm) light. These wavelengths penetrate your skin and reach your fascia, muscles, and connective tissue. They stimulate collagen and elastin production—the exact proteins your linea alba needs to regain tension and stability after pregnancy. They fire up your mitochondria, increase ATP production for cellular repair, improve blood flow, and reduce inflammation.

Sunlight on your belly helps your baby's rhythm, too.

Your newborn's circadian rhythm is underdeveloped. The SCN doesn't fully mature until around three to four months postpartum. Until then, your baby relies on your light exposure and hormonal cues—especially melatonin passed through breast milk—to begin establishing their own sleep-wake cycles. When you prioritize morning light and darkness at night, you're not just healing yourself—you're teaching your baby's nervous system how to regulate.

What I Did (And What I've Seen Work)

I sunbathed almost daily during my pregnancy. I let the light hit my belly. I honored the truth that my body—and my baby's body—needed that signal.

Day one postpartum, I prioritized morning light on my belly. Not because I read it in a study. Because I felt it. My body responded. My daughter's sleep regulated faster than I expected. And by six to eight weeks postpartum, I had no signs of diastasis rectus abdominis.

Was it just the sunlight? No. I practiced the BIRTHFIT Basics. I nourished my body intentionally. I honored the sacred postpartum window. But the sunlight? That was my secret weapon. And it cost me nothing.

Here's what I've learned in over a decade of working with postpartum women:

Women with DRA have significantly lower collagen levels in the linea alba. Research shows that light therapy combined with exercise is more effective for DRA recovery than exercise alone. Your body is literally designed to use light as a healing signal.

Postpartum mood disorders correlate with circadian disruption. When women are exposed to bright light at night (phones, screens, overhead lights during late-night feeds) and lack morning light exposure, their SCN can't coordinate proper hormone timing. Cortisol and melatonin get out of sync. The risk for postpartum depression and anxiety increases. This isn't about "self-care." This is about nervous system regulation.

Your body can't tell time without light. You can eat all the right foods, do all the right exercises, and still feel like something's off—because your SCN doesn't know when to signal repair, when to signal rest, when to signal waking. Light tells it.

How to Use This in Your Recovery

This is practical. Not theory. Here's what you do.

During Pregnancy: Set the Foundation

- ✳ Get outside daily. Let sunlight hit your belly, especially in early and mid-pregnancy when amniotic fluid transmission is highest.
- ✳ Morning and evening light are ideal—rich in red and near-infrared wavelengths without harsh midday UV.
- ✳ If you work indoors, take breaks outside. Eat lunch in the sun. Walk before work. Your baby's mitochondria are listening.
- ✳ Avoid artificial LED light. Switch out light bulbs to incandescent bulbs. Wear blue light blockers.
- ✳ Use red lights and/or candles at night. You're entraining for two.

Weeks 0-4 Postpartum: Light Exposure, Minimal Effort

- ✳ Get outside within 30 minutes of waking. Even 10 minutes. Even if it's cloudy. Let the light hit your naked eyeballs, face, and belly.
- ✳ This signals your SCN to reset your circadian rhythm and begin coordinating tissue repair.
- ✳ If you can't get outside, sit by a window with the curtains open. Natural light—even indirect—is better than none.
- ✳ Avoid bright artificial light after sunset. Use dim red lights or salt lamps during nighttime feeds. Protect your melatonin production.
- ✳ Rest. Nourish. Connect. This is not the time to add complexity. Just expose yourself to natural light cycles.
- ✳ We share practical tips on light, movement, and nourishment inside our Lying In Program.

Weeks 4-8: Pair Light with Movement

✿ Take your BIRTHFIT Basics outside. Practice Side-Lying Plank Options and Bird Dog variations in the morning sun. ✿ The BIRTHFIT Basics is our foundational postpartum rehab program. ✿ Let the light hit your belly for 10-20 minutes while you move. You're feeding your mitochondria, stimulating collagen production, and signaling your SCN. ✿ Continue morning light exposure and darkness at night. This is non-negotiable for hormonal balance and tissue repair. ✿ Nourish what you're rebuilding: bone broth, quality proteins, vitamin C-rich foods. Stack your healing practices.

Week 9+: Keep the Rhythm

✿ Continue morning light exposure. This isn't a phase. This is how your body—and your baby's body—is designed to function. ✿ Add complexity to your movement as you feel ready. Monitor your core function, not just the gap. Notice how your energy, mood, and recovery shift when you honor your circadian rhythm versus when you don't. Let your body teach you. ✿ Train outside via the Postpartum Training Program.

The Bigger Truth

This isn't about perfection. It's about patterns. You don't need expensive red light panels (though they can be helpful in winter or when outdoor exposure isn't possible). You don't need to sunbathe for hours. You don't need to make it complicated. You need to remember that your body is not a machine to be fixed. It's a biological system designed to heal—when given the right conditions. Light is one of those conditions. Not an accessory. Not a bonus. A requirement.

The BIRTHFIT Sun Pillar isn't about adding one more thing to your to-do list. It's about aligning with what has always been true: Your body knows how to heal. Your baby's body knows how to develop. They just need the signal.

And the signal? It starts with the sun. Get outside. Expose your belly. Let the light in. Your SCN is waiting. Your mitochondria are waiting. Your baby is waiting.

References:

Tchivaleva, L., et al. (2010). "Optical properties of human amniotic fluid: implications for videofetoscopic surgery." *Journal of Biomedical Optics*, 15(6).

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