

Description

Nourish to Flourish: A Midwife's Guide

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Introduction

As I sit writing this article, I'm reminded of my time as a junior midwife – devoting every ounce of energy to the families I cared for, enduring long shifts that left me dehydrated, running on adrenaline and constantly questioning if I had done enough. Even on my days off, the anxiety remained. Subtle signs crept in. Sleeplessness, emotional breakdowns and, eventually, complete exhaustion. As midwives, we work to a code of compassion, care and courage among others[1] – but we rarely apply these principles to ourselves. Self-care, I learned, isn't indulgent – it's essential. This article explores how we can nourish ourselves physically, emotionally and psychologically to flourish as midwives.

Restore and reset

Sleep is vital to restoring our bodies and minds. It supports cognitive function, mood and physical health. For midwives, whose shifts often disrupt circadian rhythms, poor sleep increases clinical errors, reduces empathy and impairs decision-making. It also raises the risk of depression, anxiety and burnout.[2] Sleep hygiene tips include reducing caffeine and screen time before bed, using blackout curtains, eye masks, earplugs and calming fragrances such as lavender. For shift workers, short naps, meditation apps and weighted blankets may support better sleep. Immersing in a warm, gentle bath can also help calm tense muscles, ease stress and allow a mindful pause to breathe and restore balance.



Replenish and rejuvenate

Fluid intake is essential to support concentration, mood and energy. Yet midwives often go hours without drinking due to unpredictable clinical work.[3] Strategies include carrying a reusable bottle, setting hourly drink reminders – even during labour care – and using electrolyte solutions post-shift or in hot weather. Reducing excessive caffeine and opting for water or electrolyte-balanced fluids is also helpful.

Regular physical activity supports cardiovascular health, reduces stress and boosts serotonin and dopamine. For midwives, even brief walks or stretching can ease the strain of clinical practice. Yoga and breathwork relieve tension and strengthen core muscles.

Mindfulness and grounding practices balance hormone levels and reduce stress. Exposure to fresh air and natural light supports healthy sleep-wake cycles, supports vitamin D synthesis, and provides psychological restoration. Just ten minutes in nature can lower cortisol and improve focus.[4]

Caring for ourselves: Caring for others

When we prioritise our own well-being, the well-being of those we care for improves. Our compassion, clarity and presence grow. This is especially vital during the postpartum period, when families face heightened stress, sleep deprivation and emotional vulnerability. By understanding our own coping mechanisms we can better support birthing people – recognising their experiences while offering grounded, empathetic guidance.

Conclusion

By the very nature of our work, we midwives are often programmed to put others first. We neglect our own physical, emotional and psychological needs which can predispose to burnout. By acknowledging and addressing our needs, we model healthy behaviour and remain resilient. We cannot pour from an empty cup, but we can remember that we still have a cup – and that it can be refilled. With self-care, compassion and courage, we can continue to care deeply for others – and ourselves. **TPM**

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