

The post-partum doula: Don't go home without one

Catering to the yummy-mummy market



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Gwyneth. Liv. Julia. Courteney. Sarah Jessica. Kate. Not to mention the mother of all yummy mummies, Cindy Crawford.

Thanks to our collective obsession with celebrities and the details of their domestic lives, pregnant women — and new mothers — have an unprecedented opportunity to stay glamorous and comfortable during a trying period.

The indignity of stretch-panel jeans, leggings and sensible shoes has been replaced with maternity thongs, Buddha Belly T-shirts and stilettos. Instead of “taking it easy” with a family pack of Snickers, it's now all

about pre-natal Pilates and mommy-baby yoga classes.

“Maternity fashion used to be considered beneath designers, but Hollywood pregnancies have had a major impact on demand and supply,” says Eva Salem of Toronto maternity fashion shop, Belly.

Among those who have jumped on that bandwagon are Diane von Furstenberg, Liz Lange and Earl jeans. Salem, who sells tailored blazers for about \$250, pants for \$200, as well as funkier drawstring pants (\$80) and T-shirts (\$60), recalls that when she opened her store a couple of years ago she was inundated with customers even before she had unpacked the boxes of merchandise: “It's not just something with which you make do for nine months,” she says. “It's usually at least 2½ seasons before you get back into your regular clothes. After delivery, the gap period can be quite long.”

That said, the months before — and, increasingly, after — a baby is born have become the focus of more than just a few trendy fashionistas. With a growing number of older affluent mothers and a chronic shortage of money and staff in hospitals across the country, there has been a proliferation of custom services geared to pregnant and post-partum women.

Take doulas. While the ranks

of these private birth coaches — who hold hands, massage shoulders and generally tend to delivering mothers — has increased in recent years, the newest phenomenon is the post-partum doula who helps ease the transition to motherhood. To have a doula assist with a birth costs between \$500 and \$1,500. The post-partum care rate is about \$25 an hour.

“The system is overwhelmed. Families are more scattered and fragmented, so [the] traditional sources of support are gone,” says

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Connie Banack, the Edmonton-based owner of MotherCare and head of the Canadian Doula Association. “With both members of a couple working full-time, the new mother is often just left at home — often too early — to figure it all out on her own.”

Gisele Gobeil, an Ottawa-based doula and former nurse, explains that after a mother and child arrive home, her role is to help integrate the new family by assisting with everything from instructions about newborn care and breast feeding to running

errands. “Women — especially professional career women — are used to being in control. They don't give themselves permission to be overwhelmed, to feel despair, and you're not socialized to accept those feelings after your lovely baby arrives,” she says. “We validate those feelings, mother the mother.”

Andrea Page started her business, FitMom Canada, after her own miserable post-partum experience. A former personal trainer, she gained about 25 kilograms, became hypertense and struggled with debilitating depression. “I was absolutely falling apart and the only way I could re-gain any sense of control was to exercise. Only then could I start to handle my life,” she recalls. “You don't just flip a switch and become a mother.”

She now offers fitness classes for expectant or post-partum mothers through franchises from Halifax to Oakville, Ont., charging about \$400 for a twice-a-week 12-week program. “Once they have a baby, women put themselves on the back burner, even though they know better. They don't like to ask for help. They expect themselves to be perfect. That can be very isolating.”

Page also offers doula and post-partum doula services through her company and notes that the “post-partum market is really taking off. We can hardly keep up with demand.”

There is also a boom in spa and health

services geared to pregnant women — and those recovering from pregnancy. In B.C., Lindsey Thomas of the Healing Way specializes in massages for high-risk or late-trimester women. She makes house calls, charging \$120 for a 60-minute session. AquaTerre Spa on Vancouver Island (a maternity massage is \$165 for 80 minutes) and Absolute Spa in Vancouver also offer special care packages to new moms.

Montreal mummies with cabin fever can attend a current roster at Movies4Mommies matinees at the Guzzo Megaplex cinemas. And while they are there, they can say a silent thanks to Gwyneth, pictured, Julia and Kate for the designer jeans, the massage and the doula.

■ Deirdre McMurdy is the co-host of Global Television's *MoneyWise*.

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