



## What is placenta encapsulation?

“Placenta Encapsulation” or “Placentophagy” describes the practice of consuming the placenta. There are two methods of preparation: (1) steamed encapsulation where the placenta is steamed, dehydrated, ground, and placed into pills and (2) raw (fresh) encapsulation.

## Why is placenta encapsulation done?

There seems to be two factors inspiring the practice. One is a reference to an old Chinese medical text from 1593 which recommends eating placenta to treat some ailments. There is no literature found to show that the practice was in place in China. The second factor is the practice of other mammals who eat their raw placentas in its entirety in one go. This practice might ensure the safety of the newborn from predators and also potential nutrients.

The potential benefits listed by centres advocating Placenta encapsulation include treating some postnatal complications such as depression, anaemia, fatigue, low milk production and pain from contractions.

## Is there any research evidence?

There has been very little scientific research available to either support or oppose this practice. While tradition and holistic medical customs embrace a number of potential advantages for this practice, the scientific studies only reports anecdotal benefits reported by some mothers. We considered several published studies relevant to this practice and found no robust evidence to support the benefits. Some studies reported the same benefits in the groups who consumed placebo (capsules without placenta). One study concluded that if the animal placenta is not eaten immediately, by storing it in a room temperature for 24 hours, it no longer reduces the pain from uterus contractions and if heated to 35°C it is no longer effective.

## What are the risks of placenta encapsulation?

- Some mothers have reported experiencing symptoms such as dizziness, jitteriness, headache and nausea. Most of the information regarding the side effects of this practice is amassed from anecdotes.
- If consumed by other family members or friends, there is the possibility of acquiring blood-borne diseases.
- In 2015, the United States reported a case of a baby diagnosed with Group B Streptococcus (GBS) sepsis following maternal consumption of GBS-infected placental tissue. The placenta encapsulation process may not eradicate all infectious pathogens especially if heating for insufficient time or temperature.
- No standards exist for processing placenta for consumption. In Ireland, this practice is not regulated by Bord Bia (Irish Food Board) or HPRa (Health Products Regulatory Authority).

## Who do we recommend should NOT do Placenta Encapsulation?

- If the mother has a high temperature or any other sign of an infection during labour.
- Mothers with genital herpes lesion at the time of birth (if delivered vaginally).
- If the baby is unwell or preterm.
- GBS mothers or if baby has early GBS infection.
- If placenta is gone to lab for diagnostic tests.

## Assistance with placenta encapsulation

Currently we do not recommend or assist you with placenta encapsulation until adequate data regarding the safety and benefit of the process become available. If you decide to continue to do this, please note that the hospital accepts no responsibility on the ultimate outcome and the possible risks.