

Fourth Trimester Podcast

Episode 74: The 10 Questions Every First-Time Parent Asks

Sarah Trott: [00:00:05] My name is Sarah Trott. I'm a new mama to a baby girl and this podcast is all about postpartum care for the few months following birth, the time period also known as the Fourth Trimester. My postpartum doula, Esther Gallagher, is my co-host. She's a mother, grandmother, perinatal educator, birth and postpartum care provider. I've benefited hugely from her support. All parents can benefit from the wisdom and support that a postpartum Doula provides. Fourth trimester care is about the practical, emotional and social support parents and baby require, and importantly, helps set the tone for the lifelong journey of parenting.

When I first became pregnant, I had never heard of postpartum Doulas, let alone knew what they did. So much of the training and preparation that expecting parents do is focused on the birth and newborn care. Once a baby is born, often the first interaction parents have with medical or child professionals, other than the first pediatrician visits, is the six-week checkup with the OB/GYN. *What about caring for mama and family between the birth and the six week doctor visit? What are the strategies for taking care of the partner and the rest of the family while looking after your newborn?*

Our podcasts contain expert interviews with specialists from many fields to cover topics including postpartum doula practices, prenatal care, prenatal and postnatal yoga, parenting, breastfeeding, physical recovery from birth, nutrition, newborn care, midwifery, negotiating family visitation, and many more.

First-hand experience is shared through lots of stories from both new and seasoned parents. Hear what other parents are asking and what they have done in their own lives.

We reference other podcasts, internet resources and real-life experts who can help you on your own parenting journey. Visit us at <http://fourthtrimesterpodcast.com>

Sarah Trott: [00:00:40] Hi, this is Sarah Trott. Welcome back to the Fourth Trimester. I'm here with Esther and I'm so happy to actually be on a recording for the first time in several episodes. For anyone who listens regularly. I've been a busy person in other parts of life and so Esther has been holding down the fort. Thank you, Esther. But I'm back for at least one recording.

Esther Gallagher: [00:01:02] Hopefully many more.

Sarah Trott: [00:01:04] Who knows when I'll be back again. Anyway, Esther, it's such a pleasure to be chatting with you. It's the start of a new year. We talked about having some reflection and how grateful we are for having this program and all of our listeners. And also we thought we could just have a refresher here, let's just go through some of the basics. And we found a list of the top questions every first-time parent asks. So this week, we're just going to go through some of those questions and hear the Esther answer out of the Dear Aunt Esther column and just see what happens.

Sarah Trott: [00:01:39] Also, listeners, for anyone who hasn't heard us before, please go to our Facebook page, fourth trimester podcast, and you can search for that on Facebook and find us and like our page and join and go to our website, which is fourthtrimesterpodcast.com And sign up for our newsletter. So you could be alerted every time we publish a new episode or have something else great to share. We do have a donation page on our website. You can check it out at Patreon - consider signing up at a dollar an episode, even if you like, quit after \$3. We're cool with that. So feel free.

Esther Gallagher: [00:02:09] Not that you want to quit, but you know.

Sarah Trott: [00:02:11] So here we go. Esther, how are you?

Esther Gallagher: [00:02:14] I'm pretty good. And I'm happy for the opportunity to do a Q&A with you on the podcast today and reflecting over the year, I'm happy to have been able to spend time with my family and all my friends here in the city. And it's a pretty good year.

Sarah Trott: [00:02:34] Life is good. Esther.

Esther Gallagher: [00:02:37] Life is good. I'm actually wearing a life is good t-shirt today.

Sarah Trott: [00:02:46] So here's the first question. It says, Do I have to breastfeed for a whole year? It's been six months and I'm kind of over it. Do you have to?

Esther Gallagher: [00:02:55] Of course you don't have to. We're talking about choices that grown women can make. I think as everyone who knows me knows that I would be, if I were your doula, I would be looking at what are some of the factors that are contributing to your feelings of being over it. And I would be letting you know from my personal and professional experience that the breastfeeding relationship goes through multiple changes and each time that there is a change, there is for some of us, most of us, I'm sure, a kind of a crisis of confidence, like, do I really want to keep doing this? It's kind of a pain in the butt right now. I want something different for myself. I want a different relationship with my baby. This is kind of a drag. I'm feeling dragged down. There are lots of contributing factors and I think that my take on it is at six months, are you still being well nourished? Are you still making sleep a priority over other things? Are you still able to find the kind of restorative time away from baby? If you're having any of that, that really nourishes you in such a way that brings you back to the baby feeling kind of plush and happy to plug it out for one more day.

Esther Gallagher: [00:04:23] You know, those are the things I ask parents first, and I actually dive into the specifics with them. So would I be recommending you give it up? No, I wouldn't, actually. I think that despite my personal experience, being pretty undernourished and under-resourced as a new mom, there was a gratification and an augmentation of my relationship with my kids. That was part of kind of sticking it out with breastfeeding and letting it get to the next phase and letting that phase have its natural history and trajectory and enjoying the parts of that, those that were enjoyable. But here's the thing. When I did end my breastfeeding relationships with my children, it definitely was doing it because I felt, in air quotes, "Over it". I felt that it was dragging

me out too much and I couldn't sustain it anymore. So full disclosure there. Do you want to add anything, Sarah?

Sarah Trott: [00:05:39] No, I would just say, it's so personal, isn't it? It's so personal. Some people don't have that much interest in it. Some people feel that it's an extension of their relationship and they appreciate the closeness and they breastfeed until four years old. So it's it's really personal. And there's no strict guidance. And I think that the modern American woman thinks it's just while the baby is really, really little. But that's not necessarily true. You know, it can be for as long as you want.

Esther Gallagher: [00:06:07] And, you know, you made me think of one more thing, and that is that, you know, depending on who you are and where you live and who you're surrounded by, the cultural, social, emotional messaging might be pretty negative when you're breastfeeding a baby past six months. And so addressing that messaging would also be part of how I would be supporting somebody if they were feeling like, Well, my mom doesn't want me to or my partner thinks it's gross or something like that. You know, sometimes I think we need support for just how we feel about it vis a vis also the messages we're getting.

Sarah Trott: [00:06:49] Yeah. Well said.

Esther Gallagher: [00:06:51] Yeah.

Sarah Trott: [00:06:52] So our next question: Do I need to sterilize bottles and pacifiers after every single use?

Esther Gallagher: [00:06:59] My short answer is no. This is probably your first baby. My mom always tells the story of how she sterilized every single thing, every single use. You know, the pacifier popped out of my mouth, she sterilized it, and then by the time she got to baby four, it was like, pick it up off the floor. Pop it right back in.

Esther Gallagher: [00:07:20] Honestly, I'm somebody who is not anxious about the world around our babies. And particularly if you're breastfeeding, you've got this whole

immune system you're sharing with the baby that's pretty plausibly going to help your baby address any bacteria and any viruses in the environment to the extent that it can.

Esther Gallagher: [00:07:50] While I think honestly, yeah, wash it off. Maybe with a little tiny bit of soapy water and rinse it really good and air dry it. I don't think you ever have to sterilize. Unless, you feel that your baby's products have started to become moldy. In which case, if they're glass, you wash them really well and you sterilize them. If they're plastic, it's my opinion you should just throw them away and get new ones.

Sarah Trott: [00:08:25] Right. So you're saying it's okay to not sterilize every single last time, but you definitely need to wash with some good, warm, soapy water every time. And for sure, make sure there's absolutely no mold.

Esther Gallagher: [00:08:38] Absolutely no mold. Yes. Correct. Yeah. So when you do wash your pumping and bottle feeding and pacifier equipment, you know, whenever you get around to doing that. And once a day is fine with me, honestly, like that's enough. But when you do, if you have any inkling that this stuff is sat around long enough to start showing and you can see evidence of mold, then it's that it's too late. Sterilization, you know, of glass would be effective, but probably of plastic would not. That's just my opinion.

Sarah Trott: [00:09:17] So what constitutes sleeping through the night and will it ever happen?

Esther Gallagher: [00:09:23] I don't sleep through the night and I'm 59. So sleeping through the night is kind of a myth for human beings. Like we don't sleep through the night. Some people seem to, you know, and claim to. And I bet their brains turn off pretty, pretty good and good for them. And I'm thrilled.

Esther Gallagher: [00:09:44] But it's really normal to go through sleep cycles and to whatever degree become physically active during those sleep cycles. I don't think we should set the bar at putting a baby down at seven and them not stirring until 7 a.m.. That's never going to happen. I think that taking some of the obsession and focus out of

this idea that babies will sleep through the night is really, really important. And it's a cultural problem. Like, we really want to be able to shut the world off, including our kids, at a certain hour and not be bothered. And I don't blame anyone for this. I, too, would like that to happen.

Esther Gallagher: [00:10:47] My ten year old grandson still gets up in the night. And I remember still getting up in the night. I remember being awake for hours in the night as an older kid. So I don't think expecting babies to do that is normative or healthy. So I don't mean to just say just give it up. But I would also add that I think often babies' sleep is disrupted by their environment.

Esther Gallagher: [00:11:27] And so it might be important to really do a deep dive search into any environmental factors that could possibly be ameliorated. And I also think it's probably really smart for parents to examine their own sleep habits to determine whether or not they are actually themselves very good sleepers. And what that actually means, aside from the relationship to the baby.

Esther Gallagher: [00:12:02] So you can think back three years before you had kids and think about how did you sleep? You know. And what was that like for you? Rather than imagining that the way your child sleeping is the problem now. As Sarah knows and as I say to my clients as well, you know. If your family system really, really means that somebody has to get more sleep at night than they're getting in order to stay sane and productive, whatever your parameters are for that, and there is no opportunity to sleep during the day, then that's a larger conversation and that's a larger conversation that should be had vis a vis James McKenna work at Duke University and possibly Angelique Millette or somebody trained by her. So that we're making really good decisions for our family and our family members, our babies in particular. I don't think this is something that we're very objective about.

Sarah Trott: [00:13:15] If this is a hot topic for any new parents, we highly recommend going back in our show and listening to the several episodes we've recorded with Angelique Millette, who is a PhD, and her whole career is focused on healthy family sleep and in particular, sleep for new babies and new parents. And we go really deep on

the actual physical barriers that small, small humans have to sleeping for more than a certain number of hours without the proper nutrition in their bellies. Babies get hungry, and then they're in pain if there's too much stomach acid. So actually trying to force a baby to sleep more than three or 4 hours at a time can be actually detrimental to their physical well-being. And I don't think I mean, that's not something that new parents are really trained on. And I think there's a lack of awareness. So please, please, please listen to those episodes if you want to hear more on sleep.

Sarah Trott: [00:14:07] Next question, because we're going Rapid Fire. My mother in law says I'll spoil my infant by holding him too much. Is that true?

Esther Gallagher: [00:14:15] No. End of sentence, end of subject. End of. Yeah. No. There's no such thing as spoiling human beings by too much touch unless that touches inappropriate and unasked for period, period, period. Human beings are a herd animal. We're meant to be close to each other as much as we want. We go off on our little solo journeys, but we come back to get touch. It's physiological correct to be snuggling with another mammal most of the time. It's why people have pets - because they don't get enough touch.

Sarah Trott: [00:14:57] You can't spoil something that's good.

Esther Gallagher: [00:15:00] No, you cannot. Yeah. And I have a sweet story about that. Early on, I was working with a lovely gay couple, and then one of the dads was the biological father via surrogacy, and the other was his husband and not biologically related to the baby. But he was the one who quickly adopted caregiving for this baby. He wanted to do the diaper changes. He wanted to hold the baby and all kinds of things. And he was this beautiful, big teddy bear of a guy. And I was getting ready to transition away from my care of them and sat them down. And I said, you know, today's a day to talk about this transition and any questions, lingering questions you have. And he said, I only have one question. He said, can I actually hold her too much? And. Like, Am I doing something wrong if I just have her on my body all the time? And I said, no. And she's a baby who will especially benefit from having this closeness. And good for you. And. Doesn't it feel right to you? I mean, do you really actually like when you go inside,

what's your own personal answer for this? And he said, Oh, I don't think I could possibly hold her enough. And I thought, Good for you. You already know. You know, I'm sure. I'm sure as a dad, he's had moments of ambivalence when he just thought, oh, I just would love nothing better than to put this little girl down. But we all have those moments. But it's not because we're spoiling the baby.

Sarah Trott: [00:17:02] Yeah, and actually, we do know there's a real negative impact. I feel like I'm the negative one on this show for some reason. But we've heard it over and over again that there's a negative result if you don't engage and have eye contact and hold your baby enough. So there's like there's like a line there where, you know, like there's not too much, but there is such a thing as not enough.

Esther Gallagher: [00:17:27] Yes, absolutely. I can tell the stories about that, too, but they're so tragic. I can't bear it today.

Sarah Trott: [00:17:34] Know we're going to move on. Okay. Next: My child doesn't exactly sleep like a baby. He's constantly flailing his arms. Is something wrong? Oh, I know. That's so charming when people say sleep like a baby, as if it means something other than waking up every 2 hours and crying.

Esther Gallagher: [00:17:51] And flailing around with your arms and legs. Yeah. Yeah.

Esther Gallagher: [00:17:55] Well, I always like to ask my clients when they make that comment. I'm like, Well, if the baby is a baby that they biologically carried, right? Like, well, what were they like on the inside? And it's like, oh my God, they wouldn't stop dancing around, right? So yep, no. Mammals move a lot and and that's how it is. And yes, are there babies on the spectrum of being humans who are very quiescent? Yeah. Yeah. I mean, the difference between how my son sleeps and how my daughter sleeps to this day is wildly different. And I got to experience that half very close term inside and outside. But no, there's definitely nothing wrong with your baby. Now, having said that, if your baby is doing very rhythmic twitching, there might be a cause for concern, but just literally flailing around. No, absolutely not.

Sarah Trott: [00:19:11] Okay, this next question is a classic. Here we go. Is green poop normal?

Esther Gallagher: [00:19:19] Yes, it is. And it can be normal for various reasons.

Esther Gallagher: [00:19:24] If it's a constant, then your baby's not getting any hind milk. And that's not good. So it may be that you're not breastfeeding long enough. So maybe your baby needs to cluster feed and isn't being given the opportunity. Maybe you've created an oversupply by pumping too much or some other way. And so your your milk is sitting in your breast is being produced too quickly and sitting in your breast too long. And so your baby is only getting foremilk and not high end milk.

Esther Gallagher: [00:20:04] There are various reasons. If your baby isn't having a fever, isn't showing signs of serious discomfort like all the time. Not just say once in a while then. I would certainly want a pediatrician to weigh in on this. But I think the best first answer is if it's constant, then it's because your milk is too much foremilk. But if it's just happening once in a while, and especially if it's happening in hot weather, it's because your body is producing a lot more fluid to keep your baby hydrated.

Sarah Trott: [00:20:51] And are there colors? I mean, it seems like it's not that big of a deal if it's green. Are there certain colors that are a problem? I remember reading that like black or red or white, like there are some colors where you do want to tell a pediatrician.

Esther Gallagher: [00:21:06] Oh, absolutely not just tell a pediatrician, but they need to know immediately. All of those colors you just said, Sarah.

Sarah Trott: [00:21:13] Like other than that, if it's like green or mustard or brown or whatever, those are fine.

Esther Gallagher: [00:21:18] All of the above. Yeah. And they're likely as your child goes through developmental phases, they're likely to go through some of those changes during a growth spurt or whenever, you know. Yeah, absolutely. If your baby was

continually like if every baby poop was also mucus-y and but your baby didn't appear to have a cold. I would be concerned about mucus poop. Not. Not if it's once in a while, but if it's like a regular feature.

Sarah Trott: [00:21:56] All right, next up, this is a good one. If I drink a glass of wine, do I have to pump and dump?

Esther Gallagher: [00:22:06] Well, the first thing I'd say about that is it depends on how old your baby is. A little bit, you know? I mean, just like for us grown ups, the amount of alcohol per blood volume is significant. Right? If you're drinking the glass of wine in the first six weeks you're giving a glass of wine to a small baby, right? If you've got a big, fat, chubby, active six month old, it's a different proposition. And in that circles, me back around to like, what are you talking about when you're talking about a glass of wine? I happen to know that a glass of wine technically is a cup. It's not three cups in a tall wine glass.

Esther Gallagher: [00:22:51] So in moderation, it's unlikely that you should have to. And especially if you're eating it with a meal and all the things that you would make common sense of if you were able to. So I, I don't recommend pumping and dumping, but it depends on the circumstances and it depends on the volume. What do you think, Sarah?

Sarah Trott: [00:23:18] I mean, I'm not a doctor. I would say talk with your doctor. But also, I think I've read that if you take some time in between feeding. So, like, if you've just fed your baby, you have a small glass of wine and then you're not feeding for another three or 4 hours later, it's probably passed through your system. I don't know. That's kind of part intuition too. It's like if you've already had it processed through your body, it's mostly gone. But if you're if you're worried I mean in your and you don't want to get engorged and you just pump a little bit of milk and dump it out, I don't think that's the end of the world. Yeah, like, I think it's worse if you're stressed out. Like, it might be technically okay for you and your child, but if you're stressing out so much over it, and that stress is felt by your family, then that's probably not worth it.

Esther Gallagher: [00:24:11] Yeah, exactly. It's not worth it to drink the wine in the first place.

Sarah Trott: [00:24:16] Yeah.

Esther Gallagher: [00:24:17] And the fact is that you don't know when you sit down at a pump, you don't know if you're pumping out the milk that had the alcohol in it or not. So let's be realistic. Like, how do you know, right? If this is you know, it's not, it's not necessarily going to be the milk that's that they're going to get at the next feed. It probably is. But we don't know. You know, so if it'll make you feel better, go ahead. But. You know, just be smart about it. And, listen, the thing I didn't say at the outset of this is if you haven't stopped your postpartum bleeding, then you have no business drinking alcohol or eating turmeric or, you know, like don't use blood thinners. You need to heal and recover first. That's the first thing. And you need to be well healed and recovered for several weeks before you start testing your body. And alcohol is a test. So give yourself a break. I mean, I know that's hard. I know that people want to. I wanted a nice cold, three sips of beer on a regular basis. Just give me three sips of beer. I'll be happy. But I forwent it at the time.

Sarah Trott: [00:25:38] What are we talking about? IPA and lager?

Esther Gallagher: [00:25:41] At the time I probably would have been happy with Sierra Nevada Pale Ale.

Sarah Trott: [00:25:51] So I'm going to combine a couple of these questions because they're kind of related. So it's how many layers of clothing does my infant need to go outside? And why are infants supposed to wear a hat all the time?

Esther Gallagher: [00:26:06] It's a good question inasmuch as there is no good answer.

Esther Gallagher: [00:26:13] Firstly, infants don't have to wear a hat outside all the time. Do you think babies who live in the tropics wear hats? No, they do not. Of course they don't. They'd overheat.

Esther Gallagher: [00:26:26] And actually overheating is very dangerous to babies. Babies can be kept warm, kept warm, all kinds of ways. But you can't cool them down if they start to get too hot in an environment that's too hot. Right. So be careful about over-bundling your baby.

Esther Gallagher: [00:26:50] If it's weather that you know you're going to have to put on extra layers in, then you should probably imagine that your baby needs two extra layers for every one that you put on. How does that sound? Yeah. Do you agree with that, Sarah?

Sarah Trott: [00:27:04] I agree with that one extra layer. That sounds sensible. And hats, no, they don't have to wear hats all the time.

Esther Gallagher: [00:27:11] Yeah. But certainly if it's, if it's cool and/or windy. Right. If it's not a hot, windy day. If it's a cool, windy day, then a hat is probably a really good idea because we lose heat out of our head. Having said all that, I lived on the beach in Santa Cruz with my first kid and she was lucky to wear more than a diaper most days. And it's not warm there. It isn't.

Sarah Trott: [00:27:39] Are you saying that was a good or bad thing?

Esther Gallagher: [00:27:42] I'm not judging myself.

Sarah Trott: [00:27:44] It's neither.

Esther Gallagher: [00:27:46] It's neither. She survived. She's fine. She's a 41 year old adult. She's doing great.

Sarah Trott: [00:27:52] So dress appropriately. Alright, So I feel like a lot of the stuff is like, you know, it's not pure common sense, but a lot of it sort of is like using your intuition. I think the second a woman ignores her intuition or a parent ignores their intuition, then you start wanting to fall back on these like black and white kind of rules. And the answer is like, well, no, it's not black and white. You don't have to wear a hat all the time.

Esther Gallagher: [00:28:20] No. And you know, I thought of another response to that question, which I think is a really good one, which is I think a lot of times babies are crying not only because they're probably hungry. That's the first thing. Right. But often I think babies are lacking not just for touch, but for actual warmth. And so if your baby's asking to be held in the environment they're in. Right. Then if holding them to your body and getting them a feeling of warmth is helping them, then if you're outside with them having to do that, maybe they need another layer. So always have another layer. If you're going to go outside. Not so that you can put them down necessarily, but so that everyone's more comfortable.

Sarah Trott: [00:29:13] Yeah. Cuddling is wonderful for so many reasons.

Esther Gallagher: [00:29:17] Great there is. I might have to become a professional cuddler.

Sarah Trott: [00:29:23] Esther. We're going to move on. Okay.

Sarah Trott: [00:29:32] Can a newborn truly have her days and nights mixed up? This is our last question. Do newborns mix up night and day?

Esther Gallagher: [00:29:39] No. They're biologically made to come out at night. That's how they are made. And they're going to be like that for at least six weeks at least. And they're not going to radically shift at six weeks, by the way. They're going to gradually move in the direction of sleeping like other human beings.

Esther Gallagher: [00:30:04] And no, I would say if your baby sleeps through the night as a newborn, I'd be watching that baby like a hawk. Of course, they wake up all night and they appear to sleep better during the day. But that's because everyone else is awake, wondering why they're not asleep. You know, like, that's. That's the reason for that. It's an appearance more than a reality.

Sarah Trott: [00:30:34] I think you said it well once in a previous episode where a baby might be thinking, it's quiet. It's dark. It's a good, safe time. Let's eat.

Esther Gallagher: [00:30:44] Yeah, yeah. The predators are gone. Mom's right here, and she's not going anywhere. I'm going to take advantage.

Sarah Trott: [00:30:54] By design.

Esther Gallagher: [00:30:56] Yeah. Yeah. And, you know, I mean, I don't know if there's anything to it, but probably the amount of light that they got during day and night previous to being born was very little. Very, very little. And so they're attuned to darkness, in a sense. And some of their best meals of the day are after mom eats dinner. So they wake up and smell the food, so to speak, and are ready for action. So that's not going to just change suddenly.

Sarah Trott: [00:31:35] Well, Esther, thank you for the quick rundown of top questions on the minds of first time parents. I'm really happy to be ringing in the new year. I'm excited for what this year holds. And so I'm grateful for everyone who helps us with our program and for all of our listeners. Again, thank you so much. We do this for you, so we really appreciate it.

Sarah Trott: You can find out more about Esther Gallagher on <http://www.esthergallagher.com/>. You can also subscribe to this podcast in order to hear more from us. [Click here for iTunes](#) and [click here for Google Podcasts](#). Thank you for listening everyone and I hope you'll join us next time on the Fourth Trimester. The theme music on this podcast was created by Sean Trott. Hear more at <https://soundcloud.com/seantrott>. Special thanks to my true loves: my husband Ben,

daughter Penelope, and baby girl Evelyn. Don't forget to share the Fourth Trimester Podcast with any new and expecting parents. I'm Sarah Trott. Goodbye for now.