INFORMED CONSENT:

Keeping the Placenta or Disposing of it

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Purpose of This Consent

After the birth of your baby, the placenta detaches from your uterine wall and is delivered as well. After ensuring that you are stable, your health care provider will evaluate the placenta to determine that it is intact and that no pieces were retained.

Upon request, your care provider can show the placenta to you and explain how it functioned to protect your baby during pregnancy. The placenta is an incredible fetal organ. Many women enjoy receiving a "tour" of the placenta. However, once you are tucked into bed and cuddling your baby, the placenta remains, and a decision must be made regarding what will be done with it.

Throughout history, many cultures buried the placenta after delivery. More recently, some families bury it at the base of a newly planted tree. It is important to recognize, however, that the placenta is human flesh and blood that has already begun the process of decay. Even if you plan to freeze the placenta and bury it later, you should carefully consider:

- Where it will be stored
- Who will handle it
- How you will prevent contamination of food preparation areas
- How you will prevent contamination of food items in your freezer

There is a current trend of dehydrating the placenta, putting it into capsules, and ingesting it. We believe there are serious risks associated with this practice. To understand the cumulative risks associated with eating the placenta as well as to support full-informed choice, we strongly urge you to read the full document entitled:

Placental Encapsulation: Cumulative Risk Assessment

At minimum, please review the quick summaries within the article.

My Plans for the Placenta:

☐ I choose to dispose of the placenta myself.

In home birth settings, it is usually the responsibility of the family to dispose of the placenta.

☐ I choose to have my care team dispose of the placenta according to local and state guidelines.

This option may not be available for home birth clients. Please ask your provider.

☐ I choose to retain my placenta.

Review of Risks Associated with Handling the Placenta

If you decide to retain your placenta for any purpose (including burial), the following risks should be considered:

- The placenta contains blood. Bloodborne pathogens are diseases transmitted through blood exposure.
- Blood exposure carries inherent infectious risk.
- Improper handling may expose household members or others to bloodborne pathogens.

Review of Additional Risks Associated with Consuming the Placenta

Before eating the placenta, the following potential risks should be carefully considered:

- Although animals often eat the placenta, this has not historically been a common practice among humans. In the majority of cultures across human history, the placenta was buried as a sign of respect rather than consumed.
- The placenta is a fetal organ — it is your baby's tissue and blood. Eating another person's tissue or blood is cannibalism.
- After delivery, once detached from the uterus, the placenta is no longer living and begins to decay. Bacteria that decompose human flesh begin proliferating within minutes. Eating decomposing human flesh can cause foodborne illness.
- Refrigeration slows but does not eliminate bacterial growth.
- The placenta may harbor bacteria or viruses, even when the mother has no signs of infection.
- The placenta can be infected even when a mother's water does not break until delivery.
- The placenta can be contaminated with maternal fecal matter or the baby's meconium.

- The placenta may be exposed to environmental contamination during or after birth.
- No test can completely ensure the absence of infectious disease in the placenta.
- Eating infected human flesh can reintroduce infection into the mother through the oral route during a time of immune vulnerability in the postpartum period. Risk may be increased in conditions where stomach acid levels or gut barrier integrity are compromised, including:
    - Antacid use
    - *H. pylori* infection
    - Celiac disease
- If a mother has Rh-negative blood and the baby/placenta are Rh-positive, there may be a potential risk of isoimmunization if a compromised gut barrier allows placental blood to enter the mother's bloodstream.
- According to the CDC, no safety standards exist for the consumption of human placenta.
- USDA food safety temperatures (145º–165º Fahrenheit) used for cooking animal meat are followed by encapsulation providers but are significantly lower than recommended sterilization temperatures (250º–270º Fahrenheit) for human bloodborne pathogens.
- However, heating the placenta to higher temperatures also carries risk. Heating human protein in order to kill pathogens can cause proteins to unfold, lose their function, and potentially become infectious. Unfolded protein disorders include:
    - Alzheimer's Disease
    - Parkinson's Disease
    - Type 2 Diabetes
- Unfolded proteins are also called misfolded proteins. Prion diseases, such as "Mad Cow Disease," are associated with ingestion of misfolded proteins.
- When human tissue is heated, the body produces Heat Shock Proteins (HSP) to refold unfolded proteins. Elevated HSP levels have been associated with:
    - Increased cancer rates
    - Autoimmune disorders
- In the majority of cultures across human history, the placenta was not eaten. Modern encapsulation practices are relatively recent. Long-term outcomes have not been studied.
- There may be additional risks that are currently unknown.

Safe Handling Recommendations

If you choose to retain your placenta, we offer the following safety guidelines for consideration.

- Seal the placenta in a secure container immediately after delivery.
- Keep it cool or refrigerated as soon as possible.
- Refrigeration slows bacterial growth but does not stop tissue decomposition.
- If transporting from a birth center or other location, keep it sealed until arrival home.
- Store refrigerated and separate from food.
- Wash hands thoroughly before and after handling.
- Gloves are strongly recommended.

Acknowledgment of Responsibility

By signing below:

- I understand that:
  - No test can guarantee the placenta is free from infectious disease.
  - Unlike the food industry where there are safety guidelines for food preparation, the CDC states that no safety standards exist for processing human placenta for consumption.
- I accept any risk of infection, illness, or complication to myself or others who handle the placenta.
- I acknowledge that my care team is not responsible for any potential outcome of placental:
  - Storage
  - Processing
  - Preparation
  - Consumption, or
  - Disposal in a homebirth setting or after I decide to retain it
- I understand that any perceived benefits of placenta consumption are not medically established.
- I am keeping the placenta for personal use only.
- **The placenta may not be sold.**

Client Affirmation

I affirm that:

- I have read this entire document.
- I have received educational materials regarding infectious disease and other risks associated with placenta retention and/or consumption
- I understand the potential risks.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers.
- My decision is voluntary.

Client Name (Printed): _____Date:_____

Client Signature: _____

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