

## CASE STUDY

# BANISHING BABY BLUES

When Lisa Cotter discovered a remedy for the toll that childbirth and pregnancy can have on mums, she decided to try it herself. She tells **Joy Orpen** how consuming her baby's afterbirth left her feeling energised and content

**I**t's common knowledge that having a baby is one of the most rewarding, but also one of the most exhausting events a woman will ever experience.

Over the nine months or so it is in utero, the foetus gets its nourishment solely from the mother's own body, via the placenta, and will hopefully become a robust, viable human being. Then comes the delivery. The actual birth can be very challenging, taking a long time and using up massive amounts of energy, which is already in short supply.

And when all that is over, the exhausted new mum is expected to snap back into action and attend to the demanding needs of a tiny, often restless, colicky infant, even though she is utterly exhausted. So what is she to do now? If she is lucky, she will have good supports. But if she doesn't, then she's going to sink or swim.

However, it seems a safe, inexpensive remedy is available, and it's one that is totally natural and easily managed. It's a fairly simple process known as placenta encapsulation, and it's been around, in one guise or another, for centuries. Lisa Cotter (36) is one of those behind the drive in Ireland to popularise the practice of using the woman's own nutrient-rich placenta to give her body a boost after childbirth. She is a worthy champion of the cause, having taken placenta capsules herself, following the birth of her own child.

Lisa's journey to this point was somewhat roundabout. Her first job was in retail in her home town of Midleton, Co Cork. But when she twigged that she wouldn't grow rich behind the counter of a shop, she went to work in a pharmaceutical factory, and, by the

time she was 21, she was the proud owner of her first house. She attributes her independent nature to the fact that her mother died when she was a child. "I was young enough not to remember," says Lisa. "But I never felt deprived. Eventually Dad remarried, and they did a great job raising us. I also have three supportive brothers."

In the early noughties, Lisa went to Australia on holiday, where she met an Irishman called Aonghus Cotter. As luck would have it, he was also from Midleton. In 2010, they tied the knot and settled in Co Cork. They now have three children, Amber (5), Sofie (3) and Finn (18 months). Prior to having the children, Lisa studied homeopathy part-time, while continuing to work. By the time Amber came along, she had already completed half of the four-year course. Nonetheless, she decided that the baby's needs came first, so she put her studies on hold.

Around this time, Lisa became intrigued by the concept of using the mother's placenta (afterbirth) as a remedy for the toll taken by childbirth on the body. So she did some research and discovered a company in England that was training people to do placenta encapsulation. She signed up for a hands-on workshop, followed by further study by correspondence. Lisa had hoped to put what she had learned into practice when she had her second child. But unfortunately, Sofie arrived at 32 weeks, weighing less than 3lbs, so it wasn't possible. "In this case, the placenta had actually stopped working," Lisa explains, "so they had to do a C-section."

Naturally, she was very frightened the same thing would happen when she got

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pregnant for the third time. "Luckily, I was under the care of a really great consultant at Cork University Hospital, who was most reassuring," she recalls.

This time around, things were very different. Baby Finn was pronounced fit and healthy at birth, so finally Lisa could put what she had learned to good use. The day after the delivery, she went home, armed with the placenta, which the midwife had saved for her.

"You treat it almost like organ donation," Lisa explains. "It must be chilled within 30 minutes and kept at the correct temperature until the next stage." On day two, Lisa unpacked the placenta in a sterile annex next to her kitchen at home, which has aluminium work surfaces and is reserved solely for this purpose. She washed the placenta carefully, sliced it and put it in a special machine, which dehydrates the material

over a number of hours. Once it was dried, she ground it into a fine powder, which was then placed in capsules. "Depending on the size of the placenta, I get anything from 150 capsules upwards," she says.

Lisa soon began to feel benefits from the remedy. "My iron levels soared, and I was full of energy, even though I had two noisy toddlers as well as a new baby to cope with. And, unlike the two previous births, I was producing lots of milk." Another difference was a huge swing in how she felt. "After the birth of my first two children, I had what I call 'postnatal aggression,'" Lisa explains. "But there was none of that with Finn. An additional bonus was that my hair didn't fall out."

She says many people find the idea of consuming the placenta repulsive, but she believes they are not seeing the whole picture. "Many mammals consume their own placenta as a matter of course," she says. "The placenta is not a dead thing; on the contrary, it's a magnificent, life-giving machine. None of us would be here if it weren't for the amazing nutrients and stem cells we get from it."

It would seem this technique is not new. According to the Placenta





Lisa O'Leary with two of her three children Finn, (18 months) and Sofie (3)

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Remedies Network (PRN) website, Li Shizhen, the father of traditional Chinese medicine, mentions using the placenta as a medicine in his definitive work, titled *Materia Medica*, published in 1578. PRN says while the process of encapsulation has become popular in recent years in the USA, Canada and Europe, it should be avoided when the mother is experiencing excessive heat, because of an infection or other illness.

Lisa agrees, while pointing out that January Jones (*Mad Men*) and Kim Kardashian went public about the benefits of taking placenta capsules. Now, she says, it's becoming increasingly popular here. "I've done a couple of hundred women in the past four years," she says. "Certain consultants are happy to recommend the service I offer."

She explains that prospective mums can contact her online or by phone. They will then receive specific instructions on how to preserve the placenta following the birth. Lisa will arrange to collect the cool box containing the organ, and will then process it and prepare the capsules. She charges €180 for the service.

"The feedback I've been getting is really good," she says. ■

See [placentaencapsulationcork.com](http://placentaencapsulationcork.com)