

The Stress-Free Pregnancy Guide

A Doctor Tells You What to Really Expect

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and Elizabeth Topp**

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Introduction

Over the years my patients have shown me hundreds of pregnancy books, often so I could reassure them about something alarming they had read. The information was almost always exaggerated, misleading, or just plain wrong. I've seen books instill the worst fears in pregnant women; one alarmingly stated that if the baby hiccups in utero, it could be a sign of a tangled umbilical cord. Often, these highly detailed manuals terrified women who could not live up to their precise specifications about everything from what they should eat to how they should sleep, when in most cases these behavioral adjustments can only hope to create marginally better outcomes.

My goal with this book is to remove the unnecessary anxiety and replace it with joy. All the information and recommendations in this book are drawn from the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG), as well as my own experience in over thirty years of clinical practice and teaching, and my own pregnancy, of course. Based on these resources, I am happy to assure you that when it comes to pregnancy, the odds are overwhelming that everything will go just fine. Approximately 90 percent of pregnant women will have a completely normal, alarm-free, healthy pregnancy, labor, and delivery.

That said, there are many good reasons to view pregnancy not only as the happiest thing that's ever happened to you but also as a significant medical undertaking. There are things to be concerned about in pregnancy; it's a risky proposition requiring a huge biological commitment from the future mother. It's difficult not to get really nervous about the whole thing, but remember, anxiety never helps! Do your best, for your physical and emotional well-being, to stay as calm as possible from before inception through the postpartum stage.

To that end, this book is divided into "normal" and "abnormal" chapters. All the information you will most likely need is in the normal chapters, and healthy readers may elect to skip the sections dealing with abnormalities. There's no reason to create more anxiety for yourself. However, you may need or simply desire to have all of the relevant facts, good and bad.

The information in this book is based on the premise that knowledge is power, so I've endeavored to explain the what, why, who, and how of every stage in a normal pregnancy. From common symptoms to fetal development, I'll tell you what to expect. Whenever possible, I'll also tell you why certain things happen in pregnancy, but remember that much of conception and pregnancy remains a mystery even to obstetricians. For example, nausea is a well-documented side effect of first trimester pregnancy, but no one really knows why it happens.

Since most pregnant women want to have as positive an impact as possible on their

unborn children, I provide clear guidelines for optimizing your outcome, answering questions such as: How much exercise is too much? What should I eat every day? What tests should I consider? Again, these are only guidelines; don't get fanatical about following every suggestion precisely. For example, if you hate milk and it makes you gag to drink it, don't panic—talk to your doctor about potential alternatives.

Although your obstetrician is the ultimate resource for your pregnancy, I'll tell you what you can expect from her, too. I'll also address questions you might have about your medical care, such as: How often should I see my doctor? Why all the tests? How do they work? I'll describe and explain all the major medical landmarks of pregnancy, although you should keep in mind that your doctor's approach might differ from the protocols mentioned here. This way, you can be prepared with questions and review what your doctors said after your appointments, which can be short, fast, and overwhelming.

This book fills in the blanks, refreshes your memory of basic biology, and helps you navigate childbirth in the twenty-first century. The emphasis is first on good information, with the ultimate goal of reassuring you that this can be the most exciting and fun time of your life.