

NATURAL BIRTH SECRETS

*An Insider's Guide How to Give
Birth Holistically, Healthfully
and Safely, and Love the
Experience!*

Anne Margolis,
CNM, LM, MSN, BSN, RNC

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the Experience!*

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Home Sweet Homebirth Midwifery, PLLC

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to women, their partners, and their babies...in this and future generations. It is dedicated to my children and their children, their children's children and beyond. It is dedicated to doing what I can to improve pregnancy, birth and postpartum experiences and outcomes, to restore vibrant health, humanity and celebration to the peak life experience of having a baby.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank my own dear beloved babies, now grown, who were my greatest of gifts and teachers. I want to thank my husband Jay, for really being there with me always—a rooted, sturdy and giving tree through the thick and thin of it all, devoted, adoring, and so very proud. I could not have been such a busy midwife and raise four kids without his huge help, unshakable stability and loving support.

I want to thank the thousands of moms, babies, and families I have been blessed and honored to help over all these years—I have learned more from you than any academic training or professor, no matter how prestigious.

I have had many role models of ideal holistic maternity and newborn care, whose books I have read and continuously recommend, whose many workshops and conferences I attended—from renowned midwife, Ina May Gaskin, to my dear friend and

colleague, Karen Strange, to esteemed obstetricians/gynecologists, Dr. Michel Odent, Dr. Marsden Wagner, Dr. Christiane Northrup and family physician, Dr. Sarah Buckley.

I want to thank sister midwives and birth professionals in my area for their love, guidance, and support—always there for me at all hours. A special thank you to two special colleagues and friends: Debra Pascale Bonaro, for all she is doing for mothers and babies, for including me and my clients in her “Orgasmic Birth” documentary, and Sister Goddess Sheila Kamera Hay for also inspiring and empowering women to birth with pleasure and have an ecstatic experience.

I must acknowledge beloved OB/GYN Dr. David Kliot who brought me into his doctor-midwife team practice as a new graduate midwife. His practice was an example of true collaboration between physicians and midwives, and expert hospital maternity care—where he stood for women to have vaginal,

breech and twin births, and vaginal birth after cesarean (VBAC) in a climate that was becoming less and less supportive, where all women benefited from midwifery no matter their risk.

I also have enormous gratitude for dear Dr. Andrew Garber —my long-term collaborative obstetrician and perinatologist, whose kindness and advocacy was always there for me and my clients, along with his medical and surgical expertise; he encouraged me and my homebirth midwifery care for healthy women having healthy pregnancies, but reassured us all he was there, if needed. He told my clients I was one of his favorite midwives, which always touched me deeply; I told them the feeling was mutual and that he was one of my favorite obstetricians. I also want to thank wonderful pediatrician, Dr. Kenneth Zatz for his ongoing support of my practice and for being a haven for families who gave birth at home with midwives.

I am forever grateful to the infinite being that created and runs the world for our ultimate good—even when we don't understand the hows and whys, who has given me many gifts, blessings, miracles, and immense hardships and challenges that made me who I am today.

— **Anne Margolis**

Testimonials

“My homebirth was the beginning of the journey that led me to my dharma. It was an experience of transcendental ecstasy. Anne Margolis was my incredible midwife. She is practical, science-based, and vastly experienced, but most importantly, she's an awakened woman here to light the path to your most joyful self. Anne is the incredible midwife who taught me, through this process, how to midwife my own patients' rebirth experience.

Her own educational course is a deep but manageable dive into her accumulated wisdom, packaged for your journey. Forget your childbirth class, and take steps to your most empowering experience. If you are thinking about conception, pregnant, or love someone who is, take it from me that her wisdom is life-changing.”

—Yours in the truth, Dr. Kelly Brogan, M.D.

“I want to thank you for your online course. Because of it, I was able to do a home waterbirth in Nicaragua where it is not common at all. I live abroad, so it was my dream to have a natural birth in my home. Little did I know there are no doulas or certified midwives in the country. Your course helped me through it!

My father-in-law who is an OBGYN in Brazil caught the baby and also has never done a home or natural birth. He only does cesarean. What a special moment for the family! Thank you again for the knowledge I was able to achieve online!”

— Brittany S., Nicaragua

“Michael and I want to sincerely thank you for being the best midwife I had hoped for. You immediately made us feel comfortable and confident in our choice to have a homebirth. I also feel fortunate from the successful outcome of my birth experience.

Close friends of mine who had very similar circumstances during labor ALL went to surgery. That shows me the confidence you have in our bodies and your amazing skills to help people birth naturally. For that I am truly grateful. I am so happy with my choices and that you were there to guide me through it all.”

— Much love & hugs, Lisa and Michael

“I wanted to say, “Thank You” for making my homebirth a possibility. It almost seemed like it wasn't going to happen, with all of our obstacles, but I am so happy it did. You are absolutely amazing and so inspiring!

Thank you for all your dedication and support in honoring women's holistic health choices. From answering my questions, my mom's questions, my husband's questions—to labor and birth prep—your support, encouragement, telling me to follow and listen to my body, not telling me to push, suggesting the warm compress, and all of the herbal and nutritional support and information were invaluable. Thank you!

I've had a wonderful postpartum period and I'm sure one of the biggest reasons is the care I received from you. I really cannot thank you enough! I hope I can express the gratitude I have for you and your practice.”

— Lots of love, Angeline

“You are an absolutely amazing midwife. My experience with you is unforgettable. During pregnancy, I enjoyed getting care, valuable information about my child's development and emotional support. You bring a lot of positive energy into the world! Thank you!! There are not enough words to express my gratitude to you.”

— Marina

“Your course and videos are riveting — both my husband and I could not stop watching...and we are the grandparents! So informative, realistic, reassuring, wise, loving and inspiring. I've gifted the course to my daughter-in-law who is finding it unbiased, deeper, clearer and more encouraging than the other classes she was told to take. Anne, your 'delivery' is fantastic!”

— Susan Sparkman

“My four childbirth experiences were among the most pivotal, transformative, empowering instances in my life. They shape who I am today and how I relate to the world, and I don't underestimate Anne's role in giving me that gift. Her support and wisdom had lasting impact on me for the way I face challenges when they arise.”

— Julie D.

“I am so happy to have chosen you to care for me. I would recommend you to anyone having a baby. You are very caring, thorough and professional. I knew I was in good hands with you. I get emotional thinking about the outstanding care you gave me and my family. We were so blessed. Words cannot explain how grateful I am. Thank you for all your love and support. This was one of the best experiences of my life. I have very beautiful memories and I'm grateful to have you as a part of them. You are fantastic at what you do. Thanks again for everything.”

— With lots of love, Erin

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Foreword

I remember being in your shoes — excited, scared and overwhelmed. I wanted to have a healthy pregnancy and create the birth I desired for me and my baby. There are so many choices and options out there, even more than when I was pregnant and what you read can truly shape or change your views — releasing fear or unfortunately increasing fear. Much of the available information today is what can prenatal scare and not care, and you deserve evidence based information delivered with care and respect to prepare you for pregnancy, birth and parenthood with love.

You have come to the right place to find the care and information you need from an experienced and wise midwife whom I have known for over 20 years. Having supported hundreds of births as a doula myself, many at home, at birth centers and in hospitals around the world, I have

a unique view of birth. I appreciate the wise midwives who are keeping the sacred gateway of birth safe and supporting birth givers and their families to experience the joy, love and

pleasure that is available in childbirth. Sadly, this is not the mainstream paradigm of birth. Midwives like Anne are unique guardians or “lifeguards” at birth — encouraging women to move and find their own rhythm and positions with birth — only intervening when necessary to keep you and your baby safe.

Many providers have been trained in a fear based model, seeing everything as an emergency waiting to happen. Rather than waiting and supporting natural birth women are expected to birth on their backs, making birth longer and harder with added precautions and technology. Humans can’t labor and birth easily when they don’t feel safe, private and when instead they feel watched and measured every moment. Anne’s gentle presence at more than a 1000 births has provided her with the wisdom to truly know and understand what is needed to have a gentle natural birth, something I am always sad to say many experienced providers will never know as the only births they see are modified with synthetic hormones, interventions and IV drips, disturbing nature’s design. So, instead of an easier, joyful and pleasurable birth, many of our hospital

environments and practices actually put us in a state of stress that slows our ability to open to birth and creates more pain.

I remember the first births I attended as a doula with Anne, I will always remember how safe my clients felt and how warm and gentle she was in her care of them. The lights were dim, music played and her words, touch and gentle listening encircled us all with her trust of birth. Years later when a client offered to have their birth filmed for my documentary “Orgasmic Birth: The Best-Kept Secret,” I was thrilled to learn Anne was their midwife as I knew she understood, and knew the ways to support and protect the intimate, sensuous and pleasurable opportunities birth provides, having had her own “Orgasmic Births.” Now Anne will provide you with all of the special care and wisdom that you need to have an Orgasmic Birth too! I am honored to call Anne part of our Orgasmic Birth family — a friend and colleague who brings joy and pleasure to birth and life!

The term Orgasmic Birth is often misinterpreted, Elizabeth Davis and I in our book *Orgasmic Birth: Your Guide to a Safe*

Satisfying Birth Experience define Orgasmic Birth as “broad enough to include those who describe birth as ecstatic, and specific enough to give voice to those who actually feel the contractions of orgasm and climax at the moment of delivery. Many of our interviewees spoke of astounding pressure and sensation in the vagina as birth approached, followed by a flood of release and emotion as the baby emerged. Whenever a woman can look back on these moments with joy, when the physical and emotional aspects of birth are fully experienced.”

With this new definition of Orgasmic Birth — I hope you can agree that an Orgasmic Birth is in your reach as you are holding the guide in your hands full of Natural Birth Secrets!

If you are considering becoming pregnant or are pregnant, Anne Margolis’s Natural Birth Secrets provides you with Anne’s 22 + years of midwifery wisdom and guidance for body, mind, and spirit. From enhancing fertility, creating health with nutrition, breathwork, meditation, visualizations and yoga you will have the information you need to

create a solid foundation to enjoy and grow during your pregnancy.

But health is not enough!

Our complicated highly medicalized maternity care system takes time to navigate to create the safest and most satisfying environment for you to welcome your baby into your arms gently, with love. Too many people don't ask questions and turn their body and their baby over to medicine that serves us when we are ill, but does not always have the best record of keeping healthy MotherBaby's safe.

The same technology that can save a life, when overused without a compelling benefit puts you and your baby at risk of complications. It's up to you to understand your options and speak up as you are the best advocate for yourself and your baby. Anne's years of experience as a home birth midwife will provide you with an inside look at hospitals and the U.S. culture of birth and guide you to ask questions and trust your intuition to create a Birth Plan for a safe, satisfying, birth experience.

As a childbirth educator, DONA doula trainer and doula myself — my heart was singing as Anne speaks about the importance of a “good” comprehensive evidence based childbirth class including pleasure and the benefits, role and value of doulas. “It's having a personal coach so that you have the healthiest, most wonderful experience possible. All successful professional athletes, performers and most leading businesses and entrepreneurs also have a coach of some sort. This is doula love,...” Anne continues on to list the many benefits of having a doula, their role, training and how midwives and doulas are perfect together. I have been blessed to attend births as a doula with Anne, so I know first hand how well we work together creating a circle of support where each person feels safe to move and open to birth and parenthood.

You may wonder why there is a section on Vaginal Birth After Cesarean (VBAC) if you are pregnant for the first time. With a 31% cesarean birth rate in the U.S., your risk of cesarean is an average of 1 in 3 people. If you go to some hospitals that risk is even higher as there are facilities with cesarean rates over 40%

and in some countries over 70-80%. Your hospitals and more importantly your caregivers rate of cesarean birth is your percentage of risk you too will have a cesarean. A cesarean rate in hospitals of 10-15% has been documented as providing the most benefits and lowest risk of overuse of major abdominal surgery. Anne has a cesarean rate of 5% as she offers a range of skills that greatly lowers your risk of needing a cesarean, and when needed it is done gently with dignity and love. Preparing for and understanding your options around gentle cesarean birth should you need a cesarean as well as understanding the safety of VBAC is important as there is a great deal of mis- or disinformation around cesarean birth and VBAC.

Knowledge is Power. Don't let anyone take your power away in birth. Anne provides you the power to understand your options so you will be part of decision making — a key component to people who feel empowered by their birth. When has allowing others to make decisions about your body and well-being served you? Most birth trauma comes when people don't feel heard, when things are done to

you in childbirth without your input and sometimes even permission. Anne is offering you a gift that will guide you to create a sacred birth memory that you will treasure all your life. When you give birth in your power you will open up access to pleasure with the hormones of love, joy and this is how you have what I call an Orgasmic Birth!

I remember my first pregnancy, I spent so much time thinking about birth and so little about postpartum. That is the one thing about my childbirth experience I wish I could change. I wish I knew and understood more about my changing body postpartum, had knowledge and tips to help me prepare to breastfeed, I would have asked for more support. I wish someone had talked to me about postpartum sex. Stumbling through postpartum, feeling ashamed, thinking that I was the only one with a roller coaster of emotions, unsure about why my body looked and felt this way, I wish I had Anne's guidance then as I would have been so much more prepared. My feelings would have been validated and I would have felt less afraid as I would have been prepared to navigate the journey from maiden-hood to motherhood.

Childbirth is an opportunity to tap into your intuitive wisdom and discover your inner strength and power. When you give birth with your choices, trust your body, your baby and your birth - you will gain a power that will transform you on every level which is what nature intended for us — to be strong mother's contributing to our families and communities. I know it sounds overused but childbirth is a moment that will change who you are in ways you can't imagine. I know that my first birth truly changed my life and set me on my path to help all parents understand what birth has to offer us. It's not just a day — it is a day that has the opportunity to heal us, to fill us with love and in doing so to create healthy relationships and families that our world desperately needs.

Natural Birth Secrets takes you from conception to parenthood and will provide you with the secrets to creating a powerful, passionate, pleasurable, natural birth in any setting. Learning how to avoid overuse of technology and the birth trauma that too many people are facing

today. If you have had a difficult, challenging or traumatic birth — Anne will guide you to

healing, as we are human — healing is always available to us.

Whether it's your first baby or your 10th, each birth is journey into the unknown through the ancient rite of passage of bringing a new life into the world. You have a gift before you to prepare to give birth mindfully, with love, gently using the wisdom and techniques that midwives have passed down for generations and now Anne has put together for you! The secrets are in the pages that follow — may you be inspired as I was to read on, to take the heroic journey of preparing to give birth in your power, with knowledge, support, love and pleasure.

Debra Pascali-Bonaro, Director of the award winning documentary “Orgasmic Birth: The Best Kept Secret”, Author, International Speaker, DONA Doula Trainer, Lamaze Childbirth Educator and Creatrix of Pain to Power Online Childbirth Classes and Pleasure Essentials

www.OrgasmicBirth.com

www.PaintoPowerChildbirth.com

Preface

Pregnancy is a time of profound transition. Who you are, as you go through this rite of passage into motherhood, will never be the same. This being that you are gestating, will expand your heart in love beyond your imagination.

This expanded capacity to love and feel will bless you by intensifying the rainbow of emotions you can experience on any given day, at any given moment. Motherhood is not for the faint of heart—it can be challenging, exhausting, endless, AND joyful, exciting, fun, momentous, and deeply fulfilling all at the same time.

How can you handle that? How do you prepare for such an experience? By becoming connected to your deep feminine wisdom, that raw primal power that resides within each of us, and can guide us in every instance toward our deepest truth and intuition.

Birth is the transition point, the apex of this rite of passage into motherhood, but it is truly just the warmup preparing us for the marathon of motherhood. Consciously preparing for birth—mind, body, and soul—yields many gifts that flow beyond the moment of birth and right into motherhood.

I want every woman to know this and embrace this about labor and birth rather than wish this rite of passage away, or numb it, or bypass it completely. There are gifts for you here that will serve you and your child for the rest of your lives.

How can you unlock these gifts? Through expanding your consciousness about what is possible! By finding yourself a guide, someone who has been there, who can show you the glorious peaks and valleys and hold your hand when you get scared and answer any questions along the way.

Oh, how I wish I had Anne Margolis at my side when I was pregnant with my first child! I

knew I wanted a midwife and said as much to my husband who assured me it was fine, as long as she worked in the "best hospital" with the "best doctor." That was my first introduction to the politics of birth and the divisions between traditional prenatal care and midwifery care.

We stumbled our way through that birth as I bowed to societal and familial pressures rather than honor my own truth. I believe strongly that you get the birth you need and this first traumatic birth experience activated me, impelled me to find another way.

When we finally did hire a midwife to attend the birth of our second child, we didn't share that information with many of our friends and family as we didn't want to expose ourselves to their fear and judgment about what that meant.

There is so much misconception and fear mongering around what it means to give birth which is only augmented when it comes to

giving birth naturally and midwifery care. What is safe and what isn't?

There is no one better to dispel that fear than Anne Margolis who has attended the births of more than 1000 healthy babies over the 22+ years of her midwifery practice. Anne's rate of interventions for her birthing mama's is astoundingly low, her cesarean section rate, 5 percent. Compare that to the national average of 30-40%! Anne's career as a midwife is a testament to the fact that honoring a woman's body and her processes leads to better (and ultimately safer) outcomes.

From that starting point, we can talk about pleasure—the amount of joy, empowerment, and transformation that can occur for a woman in birth. My second birth was a reclamation of my relationship with my desires, my own body, and my deep feminine wisdom. Rather than feel victimized and powerless, as I did after my first birth, I glowed after my second. I felt healthy, vibrant, beautiful, and sexy.

For my third birth, I decided to prepare for pleasure. In every book I had ever read about natural birth, there was always one line, one sentence, in a 200 to 300-page book, that said something along the lines of “some women experience ecstasy, bliss and even orgasm when they give birth.” I wanted to know what that was about and prepared for this on every level.

I danced through that labor and the experience left me higher than I’ve ever been in my life. Even though I had been preparing for pleasure, this birth took me to heights of ecstasy that I never knew possible. Afterward, I turned to my husband and said, “I don’t understand. Why didn’t I know it could be this good? Why doesn’t every woman know?”

Thus, began my career as an Ecstatic Birth advocate and coach, teaching women how to ENJOY birth and training birth practitioners how to do the same with their clients.

Anne Margolis, my dear friend, colleague, and co-conspirator, is a visionary and leader in

this field. Having experienced pleasurable birth first hand, she was inspired to become a midwife and has been supporting others in having amazing birth experiences ever since.

In stepping out with this book and her online course, Anne is making her years of wisdom and experience available to so many more women. What a gift!

This book will not only provide mothers to be with invaluable information to empower them in birthing their babies, but will raise the collective consciousness around natural birth and midwifery care.

Anne writes, “Let me help you have the most exquisite birth experience of your life.” Oooo, yes, mama! Ecstasy, joy, and empowerment is well within reach with this book in your hands. Read it well and allow Anne’s wisdom to guide you through to the other side!

— *In love and pleasure, Sheila Kamara Hay*

<http://ecstatic-birth.com/>

About Anne Margolis

I'm a mother of four and a third-generation practitioner in my family who have dedicated their lives to guiding mommas to birth their babies. As a holistic certified nurse midwife, Certified Clarity Breathwork practitioner, and yoga teacher who has helped thousands, I wish I had access to the tools for my earlier births that I have now.

I know what it's like to give birth using both conventional and alternative methods and I want women to know that it is absolutely possible to have an amazing experience no matter what you choose. Whether you go natural, need medicine, or require interventions, I'll meet you right where you are to guide you towards an epic, empowered experience you will cherish for a lifetime.

Benefiting from this Book

<http://www.homesweethomebirth.com>

Throughout this book, you will find references to articles and ideas about natural childbirth. The more you are empowered to learn about your pregnancy, the happier an experience you will have. You are a warrior, or you love someone who is—so take your time learning these lessons and developing your own plan for the best birth possible.

Introduction

*An Insider's Guide How to Give Birth
Holistically, Healthfully and Safely, and
Love the Experience!*

Natural Birth Secrets is a unique approach on how to have a deeply positive, empowered, and joyful journey through pregnancy, birth, and becoming a mom postpartum.

Whether you have visions of a cozy home water birth, giving birth in a birth center free of pain meds and intervention, or a hospital birth with the latest technology and emergency care access, just in case, this is the ultimate pregnancy to postpartum training, so you can be prepared from an emotional, physical, and spiritual perspective to relax into birth and momma-hood with excitement and ease.

This comprehensive training will help you find your center and feel balanced, strong, relaxed, and calm within yourself during this special rite of passage into momma-hood—in the midst of all the chaos of life along the way. It will help you tune into your deepest desires and create joy and pleasure in your pregnancy, birth and your life as a mom—to take you and your family higher.

I've taken everything that I've learned, trained and supported thousands of women, babies and their families with for more than 20 years in my private practice locally and around the world to create this book. It is my passion to improve maternity and newborn care and experiences by empowering women and their families to speak up. These are my insider's secrets to increase your likelihood of avoiding high rates of risky medical and surgical interventions, or serious complications including birth trauma for you and your baby

and to teach you to have the birth of your dreams.

I honor of the billions of strong women who have found their strength and birthed (the majority at home, naturally) since the beginning of time. Billions. It is something to remember in labor, to encourage and empower.



Recently, I saw the exam table and thought what a great place for doing the warrior yoga pose—because women are warriors, period—no matter where and how they birthed, whether they had babies or not. I am known to do yoga just about anywhere I am inspired. Yes, I did it and posted it on social media and online at my website: <http://homesweethomebirth.com>!

In all these years, I have met so many amazing women, women who have faced and dealt with a range of serious life challenges, many women who grow, birth, feed and raise little humans, and those who were unable to even get pregnant or carry their pregnancies. The warrior pose is in honor of all women who find their strength at times when it seems impossible—and those are the women I have been blessed to know and learn from.

Warriors are not born, and they are not made. Warriors create themselves through trial and error, mistakes and limitations, pain and suffering, being upside down, wide open and

vulnerable—and that is strength. Warriors get up and try again in spite of all of it.

“Strength doesn't come from what you can do. It comes from overcoming the things you thought you couldn't.” —**Ashley Greene**

We women are stronger than we know. Once we tap into that power, we birth our babies, we handle the challenges, we birth ourselves...each and every day, with the little hardships and the mountains that seem impossible to climb...until we do.

"Behind every man stands no woman. There is no greater man than the man that can acknowledge the woman standing right next to him." —**Rachel Wolchin**

Women rock! Mothers rock! We are strong because we had to be, wiser because we learned through our powerful experiences, always doing our best with what we know, have and are faced with at the time; we are admirable warriors of honor because we stayed the course, did not give up despite the challenges and struggles, and had the courage to plow forward regardless of fears.

Our blessings are that we have a fan club—the little ones we grow within us, birth, nurture and take care of, who adore us without caring about the mess, the laundry, or our to-do lists. They are the little ones we adopt or foster. They are the people we deeply care for who are not our babies. We are beautiful to them no matter how we look or dress; we are perfect to them even when we make mistakes. They want our time and loving attention more than any material gift. I would love women to be treated and to treat themselves like the goddesses they are.

If you feel like you need some guidance—
beyond what is offered in this book, you can
schedule a one to one consultation with me
online at:

<http://homesweethomebirth.com/chat-with-anne/>

You can take my online **LOVE YOUR
BIRTH** course at:

<http://homesweethomebirth.com/loveyourbirth/>

Section 1

How to get Pregnant

We will begin with the obvious first step of understanding, which is getting pregnant. As we move through the chapters, I will be giving you valuable advice based on the systems I have developed over the years that assist in the beautiful and natural process of bringing a baby into the world.

Getting Pregnant Naturally

The Fertility Method

The greatest gift a woman is endowed with, is the ability to carry a life inside of her womb. She dreams of being a mom and wants everything to go as planned. Fertility is the ability to conceive a child, then carry it to term while understanding the process along the way. The Natural Childbirth process, therefore,

begins with an understanding of fertility and an awareness of how the process flows from conception to birth and beyond.

Getting Pregnant Naturally

The first step in the process is to know your menstrual cycles and signs of fertility. The “Fertility Awareness Method,” is used to increase your chances of getting pregnant, and in some cases to prevent pregnancy. It also helps you to have an accurate estimate of your due date and this helps to prevent unnecessary or risky interventions; induction for postdates when you are not at term, for example.

It also has many other benefits like empowering you with knowledge of your own body's normal functioning, so you can embrace your symptoms as signs of health without feeling dirty, shame or embarrassment. With this method, you can know you are ovulating—without an ovulation kit. You can also know you are “probably pregnant” without a

pregnancy test; even if you had a miscarriage (which is actually a sign of fertility).

By keeping track of your cycles, you can better detect when something is off—from gynecologic and urinary tract infections, hormonal imbalances to cervical problems; it helps you and your healthcare provider figure out issues behind infertility and prevents a false diagnosis when you are just missing the narrow fertile window, which saves you from invasive and costly diagnostic and treatment procedures. It also significantly reduces the chances of unplanned pregnancy, which accounts for the majority of pregnancies!

Debunking Fertility Myths

Let's begin by debunking the myth that most women are fertile on day 14 of their cycle. While it is true that some women are, most are not. We must remember that we all have different cycles ranging on average from 24 to

36 days, and sometimes longer. On top of that, our cycles change over time and depending on what is happening in our lives at that moment—travel, stress, illness and health issues, medications, sudden weight changes, and even working night shifts, etc., can all bring changes to our cycles.

In fact, the same woman could be fertile on day 14 on one month and in the next month it may be day 16 or 20 for example. There is much variation in the time between the last period and ovulation, but once ovulation occurs, there is a finite length of time (usually 12-16 days) before the next period, unless you get pregnant. Think about fertility not as a “day” but rather of a period of time when you ovulate and make the most cervical fluid.

Cervical fluid keeps sperm alive longer and enables them to travel way up into your fallopian tubes to fertilize the egg(s); it also makes intercourse so much more enjoyable for both you and your partner. You will notice that

your vagina is moist, wet, lubricated and supple; and it is no wonder that some women have higher sexual arousal around the time of ovulation—remember inherent within the incredible divine wisdom of mother nature, a healthy woman's body is perfectly designed to make healthy babies and populate the world.

Fertility awareness does require you to make observations about your body on a daily basis and record your observations on a chart or in a journal of some sort, but it is free, safe and effective for healthy women when used correctly, without the risks, side effects, and problems associated with other methods of birth control or fertility enhancement.

When are Women Most Fertile?

As a woman, you are most fertile during your peak day of wetness. That is, the last day you produce the most cervical fluid, which usually happens the day before or day that you ovulate. You are also fertile several days before that, as soon as you start producing cervical

fluid. During this peak day you will also notice a change in your “basal body” temperature, and after ovulation, it stays elevated until your next period, or through your pregnancy.

This is where you will need a *Basal Body Oral Thermometer*, so you can have a good handle on what your body temperature is during the time you are most fertile.

It's not like you have a fever, but rather you'll notice that your temperature rises slightly above your baseline. There are other signs of fertility but *knowing your dates and cervical fluid is most critical*. This helps you know approximately when you “may” get pregnant so you can try to get pregnant, or refrain from sex to prevent getting pregnant. You may want to use a condom or diaphragm during the 9-10 days of possible conception.

The sperm can live up to five days in the cervical fluid, while the egg has a very short lifespan—at max 12-24 hours. Therefore, it is

possible to have intercourse one day, but not get pregnant until you ovulate several days later.

To learn more about your cycles and signs of fertility, observe what your body is doing and keep track (create a record) of your cycles by charting them.

Remember, the process of the entire journey of pregnancy through childbirth and becoming a new mom to this baby is such a beautiful time, but the more you are educated about the process, the easier the process will be.

➤ *“Taking Charge of Your Fertility: The Definitive Guide to Natural Birth Control, Pregnancy Achievement, and Reproductive Health”* by Toni Weschler is a wonderful book on the topic and she has an online program for cycle charting.

The Fertility Awareness Method

Now we are going to get into the entire process of getting pregnant naturally. Whether you are looking to conceive or prevent pregnancy, getting to know your body will help empower you to take more control of your reproduction, embrace and promote your own optimal health and sexuality. Fertility awareness begins with charting your cycle dates and fertility signs and your peak fertile days, so you can either conceive, or prevent pregnancy, noting what symptoms are normal for you, along with your typical cyclic changes so that you can also be aware of when something is off. Let's begin learning how to chart our monthly cycle together!

Here's What You Will Need

- You, of course
- Pencil
- Ruler
- Watch
- You can work directly on the online charting programs, or practice by printing out

several of the Classic (Fahrenheit)
Fertility Charts from *Taking Charge of
Your Fertility* by Toni Weschler

- Calendar
- Basal Body Oral Thermometer—NOT any other type, such as a digital thermometer or those applied to the ears or forehead

Charting Your Fertility

The more you chart and practice paying close attention to the clues your body gives you, the better the odds you'll achieve your goals. It is done by charting the dates your cyclical symptoms occur, tracking your cervical fluid, and your basal body temperatures; it includes noting when you have sexual intercourse, taking notes of significant life events that may impact your cervical fluid, your temperature, and the length of time between your period and when you ovulate. You can also record other cyclic symptoms you experience.

Choose a day in the week you want to begin charting... it is easiest to start on the first day of your period, which is cycle day one. Each subsequent day, you record on the chart M for menses or P for period bleeding, and the characteristics of the vaginal discharge and cervical fluid you note on the other days. The number of days goes up until you get your period again, and then you start another chart on day one for the first day of bleeding; or, the number of days of no menses increases because, for example you are pregnant—once pregnancy is confirmed you do not need to continue charting.

Charting during breastfeeding is resumed when your cycles return postpartum, although how to chart your cycles when breastfeeding and not cycling, as well as when experiencing a variety of other reproductive health issues, are covered in the previously mentioned book “Taking Charge of Your Fertility” by Toni Weschler.

Directions:

- 1) Print out a Fertility Chart**
- 2) Write the cycle day in the box** corresponding to date “cycle day.” For example, if your period begins July 26, 2018, you will write in that box “1.” The next day, July 27, is your cycle day “2” and so on.
- 3) Check your vaginal and cervical fluid** by looking and feeling it a few times each day when you go to the bathroom, using your thumb and index fingers; this is done by swiping or gently inserting your index finger into your vaginal opening, or looking and touching the discharge on your underwear or the tissue you used to wipe. Then put index and thumb together and separate them—what do you see? Or don't see?
- 4) Write your observations,** the characteristic of your vaginal discharge—

Dry, Sticky, Moist, Creamy, Wet, Stretchy, Egg white? Place the appropriate initial in the box under the corresponding cycle day.

5) On the wet days, you can note and record the increasing peak wetness sensations by coloring in more squares each progressive day or in a way you can understand.

Recording Your Basal Body Temperature

- Before you get out of bed on each morning (beginning after your period has ended), place your basal body thermometer under your arm.
- Wait a few minutes and then remove the thermometer. Read the temperature and record it on the chart. For example, there's one line with only 98's on it. If your temperature is 98.3° F, then you will note the mercury level is 3 line measures above 98. Circle 98.3 on the chart.

- Pencil in the time in the “Time Temp Taken” area of the chart on the top.

Basal Body Temperature

Basal Body Temperature (BBT) refers to your internal body temperature before, during and after you ovulate; it rises significantly from your preovulatory temperature after ovulation, due to the increase in progesterone produced by the corpus luteum in your ovary that released the egg. Why is this so important? Temperature changes are a great predictor that you have ovulated. Typically, it is said that you will ovulate between the first and third day of your temperature shift.

For women seeking to conceive, consistently elevated BBT's beyond cycle day 16-18 can signify you are pregnant; and if you did not conceive or if you have a possible early miscarriage, it will drop back down. The rise in temperature after ovulation is not like a feverish

high, rather it is a few degrees above your temperature range between each period and ovulation. Typically, your BBT can rise about 0.4 degrees Fahrenheit or 0.2 degrees Celsius higher than your normal BBT on non-ovulation days, but the rise may be slightly less in some cases. What is really important to remember here, is that you're charting your temperature so you can see the "changes" to better predict ovulation, this is referred to as your biphasic pattern (showing two levels of temperatures).

Next, circle the dates you have had intercourse on, write in other symptoms experienced on days related to your cycle, and anything that may affect your cervical fluid (like lubricant and intercourse), or temperature (like an infectious illness or frequent waking in the middle of the night), or time between your period and ovulation (like travel, unusual stress or sudden weight changes).

Understanding the Fertile Window

How will you know when to have sex to get pregnant or to avoid pregnancy? A woman's fertile window is limited, unlike that of men. A woman is only fertile for 12 to 24 hours per cycle (the lifespan of her egg) BUT sperm can live inside a woman's body for up to 5 days in fertile cervical fluid. The window for possible conception is around 6 days in total.

Women have what is called “dry days.” These are the days in your cycle that you notice your vulva and vagina are dryer, your discharge is very scant; you become moist only through sexual stimulation but other than that your discharge, vulva and vagina feel drier.

Once you begin to notice your normal vaginal discharge is increasing to include cervical fluid (regardless of sexual stimulation), you're then considered fertile. That is when to time sexual intercourse (this does not take into account health issues, etc.)—every day or every other day of your wet days,

including your peak day of wetness which indicates imminent ovulation.

- If you have sex 6 or more days before you ovulate you will not conceive, especially if on the evening of a dry day.
- If you have sex 24 hours after you ovulate you're not very likely to conceive.
- If you time it right and have sex three days leading up to and including the day you ovulate, your chances of conception are at their peak. After day two of ovulation, your chances drastically fall.

If you're looking to prevent pregnancy, consider either abstinence or using other forms of contraception during the six (6) days of your peak fertile time, plus a few additional days after ovulation, to be extra cautious, allowing for the potential lifespan of the sperm. On average, that means that you should not have unprotected sexual intercourse the

approximately 6 days BEFORE you ovulate (during your wet days) and for extra confidence, you should abstain 3 days after ovulation. So, the evening of the 4th dry day and consecutive BBT rise you are not fertile, pregnancy is highly unlikely from having unprotected sexual intercourse during this time.

To use this method to prevent pregnancy, make sure you chart several cycles and know your fertile and non-fertile times, before relying on it alone.

Additionally, this chart gives you many other options to record, for example, if you're doing IUI (intrauterine insemination) or IVF (in vitro fertilization), taking medications, supplements and herbs, had any relevant diagnostic or treatment procedures. You can note if you experience any premenstrual symptoms (PMS), one-sided low pelvic pain or ache around ovulation and track it in this chart as well. In this chart, you will also find boxes relating to your cervix—it is an optional

assessment to learn what your cervix feels like throughout your cycle. Was it high? Low? Open? Closed?

Once you record several cycles, you will notice a pattern. Your range, your normal variations during each cycle and from cycle to cycle. Then you can more easily use this information to get pregnant or prevent pregnancy. You can use this information to know about your reproductive cyclic details and health—like when you ovulated, when you most likely conceived, when you are probably pregnant, when you may be miscarrying, when you are not fertile, when you did not yet ovulate, when something is not normal for you. Remember, you are most fertile during your wettest days, peak wetness and on the day of ovulation. Once your basal body temperature rises you know you have ovulated.

A few days before your next expected menstrual cycle you will be able to test to see if

you're pregnant! Once an at home test reads "pregnant" you will want to have your pregnancy confirmed by your doctor or midwife. Soon, you'll be wondering about your "due date." Using information from *Taking Charge of Your Fertility* by Toni Weschler, you can use the all-important "date of conception" and all the information from your fertility tracking charts to calculate a more accurate due date along with your healthcare provider.

Discovering Your Due Date

Most mamas like to explore baby's hands and feet, as well as count baby's toes and fingers. The number of creases in the baby's feet are simply one of several signs this healthy baby is "post term," born in the weeks past estimated due date, when this baby was ready to be born. It is one of the assessments we use to calculate the new baby's gestational age (how many weeks baby was in utero).

I marvel how this calculation often differs from pregnancy dating. I had a mama in my practice who came to me with her last four pregnancies. She told me her first four babies were born four weeks past her estimated due date, but they were all evaluated as term at birth, without any indications of being “late.” Her last four babies were also born four weeks after her estimated due date, had I calculated it based on the first day of her last period alone; but they actually arrived at just the right time, all evaluated to be term—as I used a variety of other assessments, including past history, cycle characteristics, and when she had intercourse, to get a more accurate dating for her pregnancy.

Accurately Calculating Your Due Date

What is this due date and how can you more accurately help calculate it to prevent false diagnosis of postdates and its associated risks of induction? The estimated due date is just that—

an estimate of when mom and baby of a healthy pregnancy will go into labor; it is an estimate of how many weeks old your fetus is at any stage of your pregnancy—which is important to know, as this impacts your maternity care and the well-being of you and your baby. If you go into labor, it would be important to know that your baby is term and there are no issues with the baby's gestational age.

For example, if you go into labor at a certain point before your estimated due date, it's important to know if it is too early for your baby to be born, your preterm baby would be at increased risk and need intensive care, so efforts would be made to try to stop it.

Likewise, if you are past your given due date, in many modern obstetrical practices, in an attempt to avoid the small risk of postdates for babies that increase after 42 weeks, there is a cascade of interventions from frequent testing of fetal well-being to induction when you are not really due or ready to labor yet; this can lead

to increased stress, more painful harder labor, anesthesia and other unnecessary interventions that may culminate in an unplanned cesarean birth. Actually, only 5% of women give birth on their due date, even with the most accurately assessed pregnancy dating. I like to use the language “due month,” as most babies come a few weeks before or after that date—more commonly a week or more after it for first time mamas.

So, when speaking about due dates and postdates, I like to start with education and prevention during preconception, before a woman gets pregnant. And even if pregnant, we can still do some detective work and might come up with helpful information that may impact your pregnancy dating. I advise women to know their fascinating bodies and menstrual cycles, to track how often their periods come, when they have signs of ovulation and when they had or did not have intercourse.

With this knowledge, mamas can TAKE CHARGE OF THEIR FERTILITY to either prevent pregnancy, or try to become pregnant, learn when they conceived and even when they are pregnant before a positive pregnancy test. Mamas who know their date of conception, more details about their cycles, and their past pregnancy histories (when they went into labor previously and what the gestational age assessment was of each of their babies), have a much more accurate due date than basing it on first date of last period alone. This is one of many ways mamas can become empowered and proactive.

It also helps to connect with nature, and your connection with it—your body's nature, has its own biological clock, and you might want to look into how it relates to the moon cycles (a very interesting study). It helps to connect with the rest of who you are—your heart, your gut, your spirit, and get out of the busy overthinking, worrying, calculating mind

that has become way too dependent on man-made, digital precision of industrialized time, stay present in each precious moment, the only place where life exists, surrender to what you cannot control of the natural world anyway, and learn ways to self-relax and tap into a state of inner calm (why I love yoga, quiet meditation and mindfulness so much).

As a midwife, I certainly have other date assessment skills I use, and other suggestions to help each mama on a more personal level, but these are great places mamas can start. But no obstetrical provider or any human, can predict when a mama will go into labor. So, one of the great lessons of pregnancy is being OK with not knowing. Might as well enjoy the journey, as this is as real as life gets.

But in today's times, I do feel compelled to debunk some myths. As I indicated above, the due date is not written in stone. It is an estimate around an average time of when mamas go into labor, plus or minus a few weeks on either side.

Although I like referring to the “due month,” that has not taken hold in the modern obstetric community, obsessed with measurements. At least, we can use it between us and with your extended families, who tend to call you every day after your estimated due date, to find out if you had your baby yet.

Yes, now we have ultrasound that, if done in the first trimester by a practitioner with expertise in pregnancy dating, the accuracy of the estimated due date increases a bit. But not all mamas want a sonogram. Again, only about 5% of babies are born on their estimated due dates anyway. And it is often miscalculated, if based on the first date of the last menstrual period alone. That date calculation only applies if a mama's cycle comes every 28 days, assuming she ovulated day 14, and that still could mean baby could be born on average between 37 and 42 weeks. Healthy term babies can also be born before or after this time frame.

I love my pregnancy dating wheel that has been with me as long as I can remember. Now it's online. I like the ones that take cycle length and date of conception into consideration. Most women having regular cycles have variation, with sometimes as much as 21-45 days between them. And that is normal. There are many factors such as stress, illness and travel, that can prolong the time between last period and next ovulation, but once a woman ovulates, the next period comes close to 14 days later—unless she conceived shortly before or at ovulation.

As a nurse since 1985 and a midwife for more than 22 years, I meet many women who are well informed and know their bodies and histories, and many who are not familiar but are very eager to get empowered and learn more. I have had plenty of women know their exact date of conception from fertility treatments and go into labor weeks before or after their due dates.

I have had women who knew exactly when they conceived as they were keeping track, only

had intercourse at or before ovulation once as, for example, they or their partner were busy or not together. And, they give birth close to estimated due date. Each mama and story are different. I have had women not have a clue about their cycles or when they got pregnant. More often than realized, modern medicine does not know nearly as much as people might expect.

Women can empower themselves with some knowledge and they have more wisdom than they think; too much trust is often placed in technology and “experts” over themselves. I question the value of having to be so accurate with exact calculations when it comes to healthy women experiencing healthy pregnancies. These are illusions, man-made constructs, industrialized time applied to horticultural biological time that no human can control or predict. This is a fascinating study and discussion if one has an open mind to consider other perspectives, and the more I

practice the humbler I become, the more awe I have in a process that has far more wisdom and power than any human being, no matter what their training and background.

Oh, the journey of waiting and not knowing when, has been a journey traveled by billions of women since the beginning of time—it's part of the sacred wonder and surprises along the way. Welcome to the Tribe De Mama where we get more and more familiar with nature's own clock, realize there is so much we cannot control, and get comfortable with not knowing.