

# THE BIRTH OF FAMILY

## The First Year and Beyond, As Nature Intended

If you want to hear the world's most confusing diatribe, just announce to any stranger on the street or your in-laws....you're pregnant! The responses begin with excitement and sincere congratulations, followed shortly by no end of warnings, contradictory advice, poop stories, and condescending comments about your looks, your marriage or your sleep. You want your announcement to be met with heart warming stories about the incredible gift you have been given and the joy of family life, but unfortunately, those stories don't make headlines... we want to hear the gory stuff, the terror, the trauma. Or do we?

Nature has a carefully laid out system for the first year of parenthood, which is really an extension of pregnancy. Babies are not little grown ups needing to be pushed out of the nest to sink or swim (even though this is what North American society impresses upon us in our most vulnerable state). Just as a fetus takes 10 months to go from a water breathing tadpole to a little bundle of joy, babies take their own time to graduate their milestones, feel secure enough to sleep through the night, and ready to explore their surroundings.

As a naturopathic doctor and a mother, I want to support and educate my new moms through their babies first days of life and beyond. First time parents have countless concerns that are too often addressed by terrifying and ignorant online sources. Couple this with sleep deprivation, nutritional inadequacies, and inappropriate expectations and you've got yourself a recipe for discontent (despite the fact that this is intended to be one of the most incredible times in your life!)

But don't despair, if you bring your intentions to experiencing this short, but intense period of time as a celebration of life and love, you will emerge healthier, happier, and with a profound understanding of human connection.

### The Magic of Mother's Milk

I believe the first thing parents panic about, after the safe delivery of their baby, is milk. Even when baby breezes through latching, the worry starts to seed. "I can't measure what they take in, so are they getting



enough?" We've come to value quantitative measurement of everything in our lives yet having faith in the capacity of our bodies to provide for our offspring is not well taught. At some vulnerable moment, the formula cloud starts descending upon you. Should you just give formula? When will my milk come in? The baby must be starving right? What kind of parent am I? What you may not know is that hospital staff are free from liability when you have a sample of formula with you when you go home! What every new parent should know is that babies can survive up to ten days without any milk. In Ina May's Guide to Breastfeeding, this world renowned midwife discusses a case of a devastating earthquake that levelled parts of a hospital and how, after ten days, the only survivors left in the rubble were newborns.<sup>1</sup> The reason babies survive is that they stock pile glycogen in their liver in the weeks leading up to delivery. This can sustain them for ten days or more without breast milk. Now of course, there are exceptions to this, and that is why we have medical supervision of mother and child. Premature infants, for example, may require supplementation of sorts. How a mother delivers will effect how long it takes for her milk to come in. Surgical intervention interferes with the process of milk supply which can result in a delay.

## Nature has a plan for the sleep needs of Mothers

Under the care of a naturopathic doctor you can learn what nature had intended for this time in your life and what scientists are finally catching up on. Naturopathic medicine always has a way to improve our vital force, such as supporting the production of breast milk or improving postpartum mood. Learn about the biological basis of infant sleep and how you can get the most out of it without imposing any sleep training methods on your infant.

"Science is finally beginning to discover what babies have known all along: Babies are designed to sleep with their parents. And parents are designed to sleep with their babies. At the Mother-Baby Behavioral Sleep Laboratory at the University of Notre Dame, anthropologist James McKenna, Ph.D., watches an intimate dance unfold. It's a dance in which there's no

leader, no follower, and yet almost seamless choreography. A mother and father sleep with their baby between them in a large bed in the laboratory's comfortable bedroom. It's similar to the way they sleep at home, only with infrared video cameras monitoring their sleep stages, zooming in on every roll of an eyeball, every twitch of muscle, all night long. All is quiet and still, except for the rapidly moving, closed eyes of the baby, mother, and father. They're all dreaming at the same time. Moments later they enter a stage of light sleep together: The mother stirs, awakens for just a moment, and drifts back to sleep, moving her head a little to the left, her arm to the right. The baby stirs, moves her head to the left, her arm to the right. Then the father follows with the same pattern. McKenna, director of the lab, smiles broadly and nods his head. "It's incredible watching these sequences unfold," says McKenna, acclaimed as the father of this type of sleep research and the world's foremost authority on the biological basis of cosleeping. "The synchronization that happens when parents sleep beside their baby is remarkable." Similar experiments in England find the same dance with family bedders. But place the baby in another room, and it's like putting a wall between a pair of ballroom dancers. Everyone reverts to their own rhythms, their sleep cycles coinciding only by chance".<sup>2</sup>

What does this mean for parents hoping for adequate sleep during baby's first year? When parents are synchronized with infant sleep cycles, they cease to be interrupted in their sleep when baby awakes for food or comfort. Breastfeeding adds to the ease of baby and mom falling back asleep as the hormones released during the night, through breast milk, lull both of you back to sleep. This is a gift that nature has bestowed upon to new families.

But we are a culture of "no pain, no gain" philosophy. We are taught that to struggle is to succeed. So, of course, we often make the first year as difficult as possible resulting in sleep loss, mood disturbance, and at times utter desperation. There is another way to experience the early years of parenthood! If you are interested in experiencing this time with the ever-loving wisdom of nature behind you, then check out our latest program "Mom to One" naturopathic care for more information.

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## References

1. Ina May's Guide to Childbirth by Ina May Gaskin
  2. Maria Goodavage, Jay Gordon. Good Nights: The Happy Parents' Guide to the Family Bed (and a Peaceful Night's Sleep!)
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Dr Faith Flatt is a licensed naturopath and doula. She has a special interest in treating reproductive imbalances and supporting her patients with natural therapies from conception to postpartum care and childhood infection. She endeavours to empower her patients' journey toward health through education and

compassion.

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