

INTRODUCTION COURSE TO PREGNANCY

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BRIEF INTRODUCTION

When you feel the desire to have a child, it is a good idea to consider some basic information, just as when we start a new job or face an important task: every situation requires adequate preparation.

The birth of a child is a determining moment in the life of any woman or any man, a moment that requires a profound knowledge of what one is about to commit to. I trust that this

“INTRODUCTORY COURSE TO PREGNANCY”

will be of great help to all future parents.

I'm not proposing a scientific treatise on the subject, but just the basic information that every woman, every couple, needs to know to be able to follow the nine months of gestation understanding what is happening.

From the bottom of my heart I hope all of you, future parents, having taken store of what you will learn, will be able to reach the best results for yourselves and for your child, results that will have repercussions on the society of tomorrow.

Grateful for any suggestions or questions you may wish to ask me, I wish you serenity in your adventure towards a joyous maternity.

With love,
Bianca

PRENATAL LIFE

This starting point allows us to proceed in many different directions. What we are most interested in is considering the antenatal phase, a period that will define the rest of a child's existence, but about which we still do not talk enough. For example: when we talk about children, we mean children that are already born. Children that are still in the womb are hardly ever taken into consideration, if not for purely medical reasons, reasons that, however, affect primarily the mothers. But now the time has come to pay full attention to the child in the womb, who, on the basis of research carried out all over the world on intrauterine life, is not at all a passive being, but should be viewed as a person right from the start: a worthy person, needing care, but above all lots of Love. Love is food for children in the womb; in fact, for them, all wellbeing starts with Love.

Unwanted children are at risk from the start. A German psychoanalyst, Ludwig Janus from Heidelberg, in his book "Unwanted Children" (Ungewollte Kinder) illustrates numerous cases of people who were in psychoanalysis with him because they were tormented by sensations that they could not explain. Then, during the course of the analysis, it came out that they were all unwanted children or had been refused by one or both parents. This type of situation sets the scene for an unhappy existence and, not least, illnesses.

This explains why every woman should live her pregnancy knowing what an extraordinary event it is, that will enrich her life, and why she should give the best of herself to the being that is about to come into the world.

Not only the physical, but also the psychological development of the child starts from the moment of conception. The results of research started about 40/50 years ago show us the true identity of the child in the womb, stating that the baby: has sensorial capacities; reacts to its environment; is capable of emotions and sensations; is happy when it senses that it has a close relationship with its parents. In fact, the relationship with the parents is determining, especially with the mother, and the baby is particularly sensitive to her voice. Nowadays increasing importance is also given to the figure of the father. Both parents are indispensable, each with a different role but united in giving love to their child. This tie will bear its fruits also during childhood, adolescence and beyond. Children need a solid reference point that they can trust totally, and the foundation for this relationship can be laid during antenatal life.

Michel Odent, a well known French gynaecologist who now works in London, ardent pioneer of antenatal psychology, affirmed that the health of an individual is established in the mother's womb. He also stated that, **"We will never be able to change society if we don't change the way children are born"**. This statement helps us to understand that also in the world of gynaecology and obstetrics there is much that needs to be changed, updated, brought in line with what the new medical and psychological concepts demand for the antenatal period.

In fact, the time has come to give great value to the issue of psychological process. It is true and must be recognised that since medicine has taken over the "birth process", the mortality of mothers and children has been markedly reduced, and many problems specific to the period of gestation are now curable, but it is also true that we have lost many aspects that in the past gave the birth of a child a sacred aura, aspects and values that today must be restored.

When both parents are profoundly conscious of the role that they are playing and of the responsibility they have taken on in preparing a new individual for entry into not only the family, but also society, they must be prepared to give up everything that may damage the child (smoke, alcohol, unsuitable food, etc.). They must give the child the best of themselves at every level and live in tune with their momentary role, even controlling their thoughts and feelings, so that only the best models may reach the baby, those that will remain forever indelible in his memory. Very often this role requires some self-education.

In fact, the antenatal baby lives everything that its mother lives, as mother and child during pregnancy are one being, even if each one is carrying on his or her own life, project.

The baby, even in the antenatal stage, is a profoundly relational being, capable of giving and receiving love. If a loving relationship with the mother, but also with the father, starts already during pregnancy, this will produce a deep psychological imprinting that conditions the physical and psychological development of the child in a positive manner. All this goes towards shaping the cellular memory of the baby, creating a basis for his or her physical and mental health.

These new discoveries coming from the fields of science and psychology tell us that the physical and mental health of future generations depends on the behaviour of parents and the feelings they nurture for their future baby.

Thus modern couples possess an extraordinary instrument for the education and transformation of society, an instrument that should be explained to young people while they are still at school, so that, once they are adults, they will already possess the skills necessary for creating for themselves, their families and society a better quality of life.

It follows that a pregnancy based on love is an extraordinary instrument for the prevention of illnesses, but also of violence, criminality, and all those things that today so disturb our existence.

Fundamentally, we must underline the fact that Love is the best tool for forging a healthy and peace loving society.

OPEN LETTER TO ALL WOMEN

Dear friends,

Today I want to unveil a secret to you. Do you know who you are? Has nobody ever told you? No? Ok, I'll tell you. **You are the Mothers of humanity.** There is a lot of talk about peace. Everyone would like peace to reign in the world. We organise Peace days. We all hope to live in a world where peace will reign. But, instead of finding some peace, violence, criminality and many other negative forces are expanding in every direction. The police arrest people, the courts try them, a lot is done to try to stem this negative flow that leaves no space for Peace, not only among nations, but also among individuals. Peace is not just the absence of war. Peace is the result of a life based on things that are just and right, clear and honest, on collaboration, tolerance, on **LOVE**. Peace is endemic to mankind: it is Love in action.

So, how is it that we women are told that we are the mothers of humanity? It is because we have been given the privilege of bringing our children into the world. If we spend our pregnancy allowing our growing babies to be reached by the flow of Love, talking to them about beautiful things, singing to them, making them grow feeling wanted, loved, assisted on their journey by mummy and daddy, both reaching out to the new being that will bring joy into their family, the new generations will bring peace to the world. **It will be sufficient to bring our children into the world surrounded by Love, to conceive them in Love and steep them in Love.** And if every child is steeped in Love, as he or she grows up, this Love, that will be part of their very being, will translate into respect for others, tolerance, into all those qualities that today we feel the lack of and that will allow us to live together peacefully.

Peace starts in the mother's womb. Gandhi and many other philosophers said this. **The secret to improving the future of humanity lies in life before birth.**

For nearly half a century, numerous scientist and researchers, thanks to the tools made available to them by biotechnology, have started to explore intrauterine life, and thus it has become possible to get to know the true identity of the baby in the womb. We once believed that the foetus was just a mass of insensitive cells. Today, on the other hand, we know that the baby lives in symbiosis with its mother, participating in her every thought, her every feeling and gesture. Thus, the mother must model her lifestyle in line with the role she is playing: the creation of a new individual that must bring into the world only positive elements. And this depends most of all on the mother, but also on the father and the surrounding environment. **The mother can perform miracles, because she is the one holding the keys to the forces of life.** This is how a new humanity can be forged. Does that not sound special? Is this not a wonderful duty to have? We women being the ones that will rid the world of all that is negative?

Naturally, all of this is, from one point of view, for the moment, just a dream. But, if you think about it, if we all turn our minds to it and understand the sense of what I am saying to you, we have to admit that things could change. The Mothers, having brought the children into the world, will have to continue the educational process towards respect, rectitude, of Good in general, **and then men will look upon their women with different eyes and they will see people that merit their trust, collaboration and support.** And if what I am telling you convinces you, then pass it on to your daughters, sisters, friends, but also to the men in the family, because everyone must be in the know. Can you imagine what the world would be like if all children were born steeped in Love? Would it not be wonderful? It all depends on us women, obviously assisted by our men, but it us women who have to carry forward this new way of bringing children into the world. In the words of the famous French gynaecologist, **"We will never be able to change society if we don't change the way children are born."**

I hug you and have faith in you all, yours, Bianca

WHAT ALL WOMEN SHOULD KNOW

The scope and objective of this information is to transmit to every future mother all the indispensable and useful information on antenatal life, to assist her in living her pregnancy with greater serenity and knowledge, for her own good and that of the child.

The advantages are: your child will be born into an atmosphere of love, longing and careful participation in his upbringing, so as to give him or her from the start a solid basis for a healthy and serene life, thus contributing to the development of their extraordinary innate physical and psychological potential.

In fact, one thing that must be born in mind during pregnancy is that, right from the start, not only is the physical body of the child taking shape, but also their psyche and, consequently, their character. This is the hinge around which this new knowledge is centred.

Antenatal accompaniment is the duty of the parents who, continually manifesting their love and attention, transmit to the child those human and spiritual values that they will need to get a good start in life and to develop their extraordinary innate gifts.

While up to only a few years ago, the birth of a child seemed to be an event linked exclusively to the physical act of the birth, today studies show that during all their antenatal life babies are not at all passive beings. The results of recent research show that the foetus is well equipped with sensorial capacities, reacts to the environment, is capable of feeling sensations and emotions and is intimately involved in its parents world of affections and relationships.

For example, if a violent argument starts between the parents, the child's heart may accelerate abnormally and not return to normality even for a few days. The repetition of such events could lead to significant traumas that the individual would suffer from for the rest of his or her life.

This demonstrates the great sensitivity and participation of the child in formation, sensitivity to everything that disturbs them, such as loud noises, rock music, discordant voices, etc., but also to pleasant things such as the voices of the mother and father and of all other friendly people. The child in the womb follows everything that is going on in the surrounding environment, thus developing its innate learning skills and at the same time stimulating into action its sensory organs.

During pregnancy, it is not enough to monitor progress solely by means of scans, clinical analysis and medical controls to verify the perfect health of mother and child. One must also dedicate attention to fostering the mother-father-child relationship on an affective level, so that it may be truly possible for a complete being to be born, not just with a healthy body, but also a healthy mind.

So, what must we do? Transmit to the baby positive sentiments and emotions and **above all mountains of love** and joyous acceptance of their existence. **Love is food for the baby.** Love will assist them in their growth. Both parents will have to speak and play with the child, sing songs, tell fairy tales, recite nursery rhymes and play sweet melodies to the baby. Choosing classical music, Mozart and Vivaldi are favourites, particularly the early compositions. After birth, the child will recognise all the sounds heard before and will understand that birth itself was just a passing from 'before' to 'after' and that there is continuity with everything they have learnt so far. One can therefore say that everything children experience in antenatal life contributes to forming the basis for the rest of their existence. **And, if the first phase is positive at all levels, this will be the foundation for the following phases, which in turn will develop in a positive manner.**

The importance of every gesture or tenderness towards the child is not limited to the act in itself, but it serves as a stimulus of the corresponding sensorial organs in their development. These experiences are lived in symbiosis with the mother. This helps us to understand why it is important to spend quality time with the baby, who, when he comes into the world, will bring with him nine months of experience.

This is why during pregnancy the future mother, in this period in which she is intimately involved in the most important function of her role as a woman, will have to adapt herself right from the start to her duty of educator, trying to control her thoughts and feelings as well as her behaviour.

Psychological and psychoanalytical observations demonstrate that the baby perceives the emotions of the mother and registers the feelings, thoughts and ideals that occupy her mind.

The voice of its future mother plays a structural role in the development of the baby's psyche. This is all transmitted partially via hormones, but also by means of the empathy that is at the base of the mother daughter relationship. Thus, the future mother can offer, first to the embryo and then to the foetus, the best elements and most favourable conditions for the child to develop all the extraordinary potential contained in its genetic capital.

Also the father, who shares the period with the mother and who must create around her an atmosphere of respect, love, support, protection and serenity, communicating with the baby with his own voice and by touch, creates a first bond with the child, a bond that will continue to consolidate itself in time. Today we no longer speak of a mother/child bond, but of a mother/father/child bond. In fact, the presence and involvement of the father is of extreme importance for the development of the child. And if the father follows consciously all the phases of the development of the baby in the womb, then from the start there will be a bonding between all three. This empathy will be for the child a first experience of love, and it will consolidate the union of the couple.

For the child, the absence of an affective relationship generates fear, and fear is the source of many traumas that will manifest themselves later in the life of the individual, generating much suffering.

It is on the basis of all these elements that one gradually becomes a parent. Unfortunately parenthood is a role for which society does not prepare us at all. But all this information about "Antenatal Life" is generating new models in the field.

Accompanying childbirth costs nothing; it simply requires future parents and all those who are near them to **become aware:** gynaecologists, obstetricians, psychologists, operators, family members and society in general. The concept of accompanied birth should, in fact, enter into our collective consciousness. It is important to take every opportunity to divulge this information.

Let us try to imagine a world in which only wanted children are born, in which the being that will be born is loved even before being conceived, in which the birth of a child is considered a sacred event, which respects the mother who bears the baby who is entering the world... If this could become reality, we would certainly live in a better world. And it is exactly to this "better world" that we aspire, for the joy of our children, grandchildren and all those who will come in the future.

Thus, physical and affective accompaniment of childbirth is important from various points of view:

- physiological, because it aims at producing physically healthy babies;
- psychological, because it fosters psychological health and strong well balanced characters;
- anthropological, because it is of capital importance for humanity and its evolution;

THE CHILD SPEAKS TO HIS PARENTS FROM THE MOTHER'S WOMB

A child speaking from the womb:

"I am pleased that you have given me an opportunity for communicating with the world, because I have a lot to say, also in the name of all children, those who are about to be born, but also those that will be conceived in the future.

First of all, I would like to thank my Mother who, with great gentleness, supplies me not only with the nourishment necessary for the development of my body, but also with demonstrations of tenderness that manifest themselves in various forms. I can feel all these things, I feel that she already loves me and that she is looking forward to the day in which she will be able to cradle me in her arms. I too can't wait for that moment, to see her face, smell her perfume, feel her warmth! But we must wait patiently. In the meantime, I like hearing her voice, especially when she is talking to me. And even if she does it only in her thoughts, I can perceive it, because during all these nine months we are a single person, even if at the same time we are two distinct people, each with his or her own destiny and life programme.

And, just as I can hear her thoughts, I also perceive her feelings and am happy when I can sense that she is tranquil and serene. If she is tranquil, then I can be too; and, when I am tranquil, I can better spend my time in building those cells that are necessary for the construction of my tiny body. It is a big job, but my mother helps me by providing all the necessary substances, the purest and the most important. I am very grateful to her, also because everything she sends me is steeped in love. Her thoughts and feelings, everything is steeped in love, and this is how I receive the necessary elements also for forming my psyche. And this collaboration is wonderful. Thank you, Mummy!

How I love it when she sings for me! I can feel that hearing good music is good for me and helps me to grow. Mummy knows lots of good songs. There are some very gentle lullabies, and I'm sure that she will sing them to me later as well, when I'm in my cot. Hearing songs that I already know will certainly help me calm down in moments of agitation, because I will understand that birth was only a moment of passage from then to now.

Maybe that is why my ears can already hear, to be able to memorise everything already, and to be able to recognise things and appreciate them better later. In fact, I know all the sounds of my external house: the phone, vacuum cleaner, but the one I like most is the voice of my Mummy, not only when she speaks to me, but also when she sings.

Five months have passed and I am already capable of taking part in everything that is going on around me. I don't recognise only my Mummy's voice, but also my Daddy's deeper voice. How lovely it is when he strokes me! Actually, he strokes Mummy's tummy, but I can tell it's him. It's a special touch that makes me happy every time. And, when we play "kicking" I really have fun! Mum and Dad have fun too, because they can feel my presence, and I am even happier than they are because I feel loved and wanted. In fact, for us babies, love is a fundamental nourishment.

I feel sorry for all those children who in the past were not able to live these joyous moments. Once upon a time everyone thought that, before birth, we babies were insensitive little beings, incapable of feeling anything, not even physical pain. They used to say that only at birth would we become a person; before that we were simply a mass of cells. Only our Mummy carried us in her heart, and sometimes not even she did, but I don't want to talk about that. It hurts too much.

Today, everything is different, and we owe this to the many scientists and researchers that for years have been peering into our world, inside our Mummy's tummy. They can do this now because they have the necessary instruments, but we don't like them because they are terribly noisy. It is, however, true that Mum and Dad can look at us in a little window, and this is a very emotional experience for them, they find themselves looking at a reality that previously was only part of a dream. So they can watch us sucking our thumbs or whilst we are having a wee, they see us move

and, very often, they can tell if we are a boy or a girl. Usually it is the Dad who wants to know, while the mother says she is not bothered, she just wants the baby to be healthy and perfect.

In the meantime, the doctors observe us, monitor us, measure us and decide whether everything is proceeding according to plan. However, all this is not very pleasant; I have heard that we will be a generation of helicopter lovers, because the instrument that observes us makes the same kind of throbbing noise.

Sometimes they enter that sack that encloses us with a long needle to collect some liquid, and this is scary. I know that some babies have been able to push the needle away with their hand because it scares them. These are all strange things, but they say that they are important.

However, we have to be grateful to all the researchers, because it is due to them that we have been given the attention we deserve, so that we too get taken into consideration and are cared for as is right, because us foetuses have needs too, not just the new born babies. Generally, people always talk about them, whereas we too are part of a society that is in a phase of renewal.

One thing I really like is when Mummy and Daddy go for a walk in Nature. In those moments I feel that I am receiving the benefit of something that we shall call 'oxygen'. They say that it is very important for the development of our brain. They say that when the brain is well developed this is beneficial also for all the other organs. In fact, I can sense that this is really true. I hope that Mummy and Daddy will often go for trips into the country, not just for me, but also because also for them it is a beautiful moment of togetherness. They spend the majority of their time at work, so these walks are moments that bring them together and, involving me – because their conversations are always about their future with their child, that's me – and help to consolidate the Mother/Father/Child bonding that will continue to hold us together even later on. And this union gives me a sense of tranquillity and strength, because I know that in them I will always have strong and sincere friends.

Now, I am happy to have been able to say all these things. There is a lot more to say, but I'll do it later. Ah! Wait! There are two more things I need to tell you: one is that when the moment of my birth arrives, I would like my Daddy to be with us, to help us and be close to us, and I am sure that Mummy would like him there too. The second thing is that, after being born, I'll need to stay with my Mummy. The passage from foetus to baby is a very delicate one, and close to my Mummy I'll feel safe and protected. Just born, it is important that I stay close to my Mummy, so that I can see her expression and receive her kisses and caresses. We need to stay close so that we can turn into reality all the things we have dreamt about in the preceding months. What a great joy it will be to be held in her arms!

Daddy's presence will also be very important. I would like it to be him who cuts the umbilical cord to separate me from Mummy and thus creates our family. It would be good if it were Daddy to give me my first bath. We babies are very sensitive to this kind of loving attention, it helps us get our existence in this world off to a joyous start.

Everyone will be asking: but how can he understand, distinguish words, hear what people are saying to him? In fact, it is not the words that reach us, but that flow of deep felt sentiments that overcomes all barriers, that does not require phrases or concepts, but that goes straight to our little hearts, which are always sensitive and receptive of all sincere and loving sentiments.

This is how I face my new life in the world full of confidence, and I can feel that I am a being that will live in a positive manner, with all that follows, thanks first of all to my Mummy, but also to my Daddy and to all those people who are waiting for me with so much love.

What I would like to say is that in the Charter of Children's Rights it would be correct to take into consideration **the rights of children yet to be born**. In fact, we would like to claim our right to be born into a family that had conceived us because they really wanted us, that already love us even if they have not yet met us personally, and that can give us everything we need to lead a healthy life, full of interests, and for our physical and psychological growth, for our family and the whole of society. We could eliminate so many problems and displeasures that preoccupy everyone.

We are not asking for a lot; we just need to be loved, because for us love is food.

And if we receive love today, when we grow up we will pay it back a hundred fold, for the good of everyone.

With much gratitude,

An antenatal baby

The words of the antenatal baby reflect the concepts expressed by many scientists and researchers around the world, who are exploring the intrauterine world and everything that concerns the physical and psychological growth of the unborn child. The ignorance of the past is no longer tolerated, especially in the light of the fact that, as a determining period, antenatal life has an effect on the rest of existence.

THE FATHER – BECOMING PARENTS TOGETHER

In the past, most studies on the behaviour of parents during antenatal life and the effect it had on the baby in the womb focussed on the behaviour of the mothers. Hardly anyone had stopped to consider the behaviour of fathers. Entering this field represents a very important step.

Today, we find young fathers who display a loving and protective attitude towards their pregnant partner; these are the fathers who are looking forward to welcoming their child with open arms.

The fathers who display this behaviour love and protect their antenatal baby, ensuring that it is growing healthily, that it is well looked after and receives all the necessary attentions. They talk to the baby, sing to it, play with it and stroke it through the mother's stomach, they rejoice when they feel its little feet kicking and hear its tiny heart beating. These are fathers who are present, and, even if they don't know it, they are displaying love for their child even when they are being loving with the mother. These fathers show empathy when the mother is tired or unwell, and they help around the house more than usual.

They are the fathers that accompany the mothers to the pre-birth courses, that learn to massage their partner and who feel surprisingly involved, almost as if they were the ones giving birth themselves.

Pregnancy is not a female exclusivity, and it is right that the couple should live the experience together, because it is precisely during pregnancy that the correct equilibriums are established in the couple.

For the woman, the period of pregnancy can present various physical and psychological problems. In these cases the father reacts with great tenderness and a good dose of patience and understanding.

During the birth, the father is an important support for the mother, and for the majority of men this participation is a positive experience. The men follow the contractions, they breathe together with the woman and above all they give continued and loving encouragement. And it is precisely in these moments that the roles of each partner become evident, especially the role of the father which already starts during the pregnancy, but which for too long it had been denied.

In fact, to develop a new self image of one's paternal role and to perform this duty well, it is necessary to establish a bond between the triad right from the start of the pregnancy, preferably even before. This is virgin territory for most men, as the fathers of the past had never faced up to this issue. Men do not have a key to access the intrauterine world, nonetheless they are capable of activating a deep and satisfying bond with their child well before it is born, to the great joy of the mother.

Once the child is born, they declare that they have lived this experience with an intensity and joy that they had never imagined they were capable of feeling.

This is the new generation of fathers. No nostalgia, therefore, for the authoritarian figure of the past, who didn't participate in the birth of his child and who obtained absolute obedience from his children at all ages, causing permanent damage to their very soul. Fortunately they were not all like this, but far too many were.

Today we need fathers who will react genuinely to their children's needs, at any age, who can be an important reference point. And there is no better way to get to know one's child, to be able to play to the full one's role as parent, than to have followed him or her with love right from the conception.

The father is the third pole of the family triangle. He is the male figure that – when the time comes – will favour the detachment from the mother, projecting his child into the world.

The role of the father is that of initiating his child into life, of being a bridge into society, especially from the age of 7 or 8, indicating by his own behaviour the norms and limits, and supporting the child in facing the trials of life, starting with school.

And it is with a spirit of giving, not exchange, that the father plays his educational role,

without expecting any form of recompense. The reward, if there is to be one, will come once the child has grown up.

CONCEPTION

Bringing a child into the world is not a decision to be taken lightly. The pace of our daily life, our uncertainties, our fears, our needs, all these things impose on us a need for reflection. And this is right. In fact, for a number of years the presence of a child will absorb all our attention, and we have to be prepared to give up many moments in the day that in the past gratified us. Facing the arrival of a child we must prepare ourselves for a total change in our life style in order to adapt ourselves to our new role. The compensation, however, is the great joy we receive, capable of annulling any unease created by having given anything up.

To be able to evaluate things in an impartial and correct manner, potential parents should receive adequate information on all the joyous and positive aspects, but also on those that are more demanding, of having a child, and on the relationship with him not only after birth but also before, during the pregnancy, intended as a determining period in the life of every individual that will be reflected in the rest of his or her future existence.

Today there are many couples that, facing up to such an important role as becoming parents, try to refine their sensibility and increase their competence, preparing themselves for the task ahead.

Among other things, it is useful to know that, as physics teaches us, every cell that has determined characteristics, multiplying itself, transmits to the new cells the same qualities. Therefore, if the initial cell is steeped in strong vibrations of Love, so will all the others be. Thus a child conceived in Love will be born. In fact, Love is food, life for the growing baby. Every child should be born in the sign of Love, **only if he or she is truly wanted**. No unwanted should ever come into the world again.

Furthermore, just as the farmer does, who to obtain a good harvest first ploughs his land, removes all the stones and weeds, fertilizes it, and, when everything is ready, before sowing the seeds, checks to see if they are fresh and healthy, so should future parents also do: prepare the best possible environment into which to bring a new life. This means: not only checking one's own state of health, but also sorting out tensions and any old rancours with one's parents, relations and friends, to be able to move forwards into parenthood free of any baggage that may weigh down our existence.

A child? Yes, but when we are certain that we will be able to give it everything it needs. Affective stability, economic security, space and time are certainties that today we try to achieve before bringing a child into the world. And these are the factors that contribute to creating conscious and aware mothers and fathers.

Today it is less common that a child is the result of an accident, of chance. It is, on the other hand, more and more common that the child is wanted. Contraception, in circulation from the seventies, has changed the way we become parents. A child should only be conceived when a strong and profound relationship has been created between the two partners. **In fact, A CHILD SHOULD BE BORN WHEN HE IS GENUINELY DESIRED**, not when it just "happens", as used to be the case in the past.

But the desire for a child cannot always submit to the logic of reason. It is a very powerful feeling, instinctive, "passionate", welling up from the regions of our subconscious, that sometimes erupts into the relationship of the couple at the most inopportune moment.

It is important, however, to leave space for also for unexpected events and to accept that something may happen that was not totally planned.

Once the conception has occurred, living pregnancy solely in the anxiety of finally meeting one's child would be to miss a unique and unrepeatable opportunity to experience the coming nine months as one of the most rich and beautiful moments of dialogue and affectivity not only with the child, but also between the two future parents.

- preventive, in that a serene, happy and loving pregnancy facilitates the birth, avoids traumas and babies being born too soon. **This preventive action goes as far as avoiding the creation of violence and criminality.**

Overall, the final objective of Antenatal Accompaniment is that of ensuring a better quality of life for the child, the family, society and, subsequently, the entire world. It is better to bring into the world a child that is psychologically and physically healthy, than to have to take measures later.

PARENTHOOD

Both mother and father fantasise about the coming child, still to be totally invented, a very important process on the road to parenthood. It is how we prepare a mental and affective space in which to host our little guest.

The man, even before the child is born, projects onto him a future reality, with well defined contours, such as the projects that will bind him to his son. It is a very concrete and active way of imagining his son and a relationship based on 'doing things together'.

The woman, on the other hand, tends to think about her child as still being part of herself, inside her body and mind. And, if she thinks about him already born, he is still a very small child, to be held in her arms, to be nurtured, covered, warmed and cuddled...

However, during pregnancy, it is a good thing not to consolidate one's desires for a little boy or girl. If a girl is born when the parents wanted a boy, the girl realises that she is not the boy the parents wanted, and this sensation could affect her wellbeing.

As long as the fantasies of the parents spread out in the widest possible fan, then the future of the child is open, unhindered by their desires. If given space, it will then be the child that will demand, a bit at a time, to be accepted for what he is, and not for what he might have been: a boy or a girl.

However, it must not be forgotten that though during pregnancy mother and child form a single body, at the same time they are two distinct people, each with its own destiny and its own projects for life. In fact, the child is born free, and imposing limits on someone who is born free is criminal.

As long as the child is small, naïve and inclined to believe everyone, it is easy for him to fall victim of constraints, but later, as he gradually gains consciousness, he feels lack of air, space and light he needs to be able to grow. And this is how unhappiness and a loss of self-esteem comes about, turning back his development. The uphill road becomes a backwards slide, a turning back, a walk in reverse, a surrender, a dark retreat. Facing uneven odds, the child adapts, to guarantee his own survival. But this forced acceptance is the seed of rebellion, aggression and violence. In fact, a lack of comprehension can slow down development more than a lack of food. Growth requires Love above all else. The lack of Love, of joy, of harmony with oneself and with others, inevitably leads to illness and a breakdown of one's equilibrium.

Today the desire of parenthood is tied more to sentiments, dreams, fantasies, often subconsciously. The child that the man wants is an imaginary child, like the better part of his own self, what he would or liked to have been but wasn't, a child to whom he can give everything he ever wanted but had never had. This makes the man more inclined to pick up on subconscious messages and fantasies, tied to a dream of paternity that is more affective than social.

Today, a new father figure is emerging, a father who can come down from his pedestal and live in harmony with his woman and with his child. This new kind of father is more in touch with daily experiences, also because men today are more capable of accepting the 'female' components of their personality, such as tenderness. This is a totally new transformation, which is still taking place.

There is also a greater capacity among men for sharing that mysterious event that women live inside their body during pregnancy. They manifest this in many ways, also by the tenderness of physical contact, physical closeness which is not just sexual, like when they stroke the mother's stomach or press their ear on it to hear the heart beat of the baby. The father participates in the happiness, satisfaction and pride of the woman for the child that is growing inside her. But he also participates in her anxieties and her preoccupations. He accompanies her to the gynaecologist, to the antenatal courses, chooses together with her the clothes, the cot, the name. He feels less distant from the child, also because of the visibility afforded by a scan.

This is a phenomenon of society that reveals a deep change, a far more intense participation of the man during pregnancy at all levels: physical and affective.

If a father follows the evolution of his child before birth with so much participation, he will continue to do so also after the birth, accompanying him step by step through his infancy, adolescence and beyond. He will continue until the child has acquired a solid base within the bosom of his family, from which to launch himself into flight, rendering himself independent, self-sufficient and living his own life. His family will, however, always be an important reference point for him. A child that has grown up in a healthy environment will never feel the need to join a “gang” in order to find friendship.

Even when he will be distant from his parents, a child brought up in love, harmony, respect and understanding will always be grateful for that precious baggage of values he has received.

The poet Kalil Gibran, in his book “The Prophet”, wrote:

*Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you, yet they belong not to you.
You may give them your love but not your thoughts.
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.
You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.*

Recommended book:

Fathering Right from the Start (Pregnant Fathers) by Franck Heinowitz – New World Library

ACCOMPANIMENT DURING PREGNANCY AND PREPARATION FOR THE BIRTH

Normally it would be called “Preparation for delivery” – and this in truth is the final aim – but what goes on every Wednesday at the ELIOTROPO www.eliotropo.org is far more. It is a true **PREGNANCY ACCOMPANIMENT** at all levels. It is an enrichment not only of useful information but also of interior aspects; it is a reawakening of consciousness that renders Mothers capable of experiencing fully the beauty of the role they are about to undertake.

Theoretically, it should start even before conception, because it moves towards a new way of considering the birth of a child, towards a new world that the Mothers did not know. This is demonstrated by the joy with which they prolong the Wednesday meetings, sometimes for hours, such is their desire to ask questions, to know more, to speak to Evelyne Disseau and her collaborators, to not want to leave, to bask in the friendly atmosphere that is generated on these occasions. For them it is a precious moment when they can drink from a very loving, but also profoundly competent, fountain of knowledge.

And what can we say about the Daddies? They are extraordinary, always present, so interested and involved you would think they were the ones giving birth. And in the letters they write to Evelyne Disseau and her collaborators after the birth of their child, they express their gratitude for having been followed, instructed and accompanied towards such a wonderful experience that went beyond their imagination: the birth of a child.

One only has to read the programme of the ELIOTROPO to understand the great wealth of information that Evelyne Disseau transmits, and if we reflect on the fact that all this involves also the child as the main protagonist of the situation, then one thing is certain: Mother, Father and Child benefit from these extraordinary moments of aperture towards a new consciousness, a new awareness that is open to the true values of life.

Now Evelyne Disseau, responding to the many requests coming from Mothers who do not live in Milan and cannot participate in person, has made herself available to transmit to them via post or Internet all the useful information, so that they may just the same receive an adequate preparation, so that they may feel accompanied and not alone in a period during which a woman, due to the delicate moment she is living, needs to be supported in all her needs.

The activities that take place at the ELIOTROPO are the following:

- Discussing the most important issues experienced during the week
- Learning to breathe normally also during labour and childbirth
- Analysing the week's dreams
- Diet and hygiene during pregnancy
- Observing oneself and adapting to the changing pace of life
- Yoga: gentle exercises that raise awareness, consciousness of one's body and mind, combined with breathing to help self-control. Exercises that have a beneficial effect on the elasticity of ligaments and tendons, toning the muscles in general and the pelvis in particular.
- Learning to relax
- Learning about the child from conception to childbirth and beyond. Getting to know the child in the womb and communicating with him with one's voice

and by interiorisation. Using music and song. Learning to play with the child in the womb.

- Rediscovering one's body through oriental dance. Dancing with the child.
- Creating, after deep relaxation
- The participation of the father in all activities
- Getting to know oneself better by means of transactional analysis
- Communication during pregnancy: within the couple, with the family and with society
- Separation from one's own mother
- Preparation for the birth
- Shiatsu: the birth points
- The post-partum
- Preparation for breast feeding
- The new born baby
- Educating the child
- Course just for fathers one Saturday morning a month
- Course for grandparents one Saturday afternoon in the month following the birth
- "Audiopsychofonology" during pregnancy
- And many more things ...

To learn more click on www.eliotropo.org

PREGNANCY

“A thousand feelings and sensations overran you when you discovered that you were expecting a baby. That is how the adventure of childbirth starts, amid a turbulence of stupor, joy and fear... But now relax and enjoy, day by day, the most beautiful of all experiences.

It is not you that is giving life, but life that is entering you, it works inside you and performs its duty. You must be ready to receive it, to accept it, to collaborate. Ready to give your whole self: your body, your mind, your emotions; but also to receive a lot when you enter into visual contact with the fruit of this energy and you will be able to touch and stroke your little one.

Your child is not your personal property. You have allowed him to come into the world and you will bring him up with all your love.

You will do this not just for him, but for everyone, because your child is an integral part of the whole universe; and if you help him grow up healthy and strong in body, free in mind and kind in sentiments, your child will be a harmonious note in the great universal symphony.”

Francesca Palmegiano

Life before birth is a fascinating subject that has scientific, social and psychological aspects that would never have been imagined just a few years ago. In fact, today we know that **a human being is the sum of his experiences** that start from very early on, from inside the maternal womb, experiences that will have a great impact on the rest of his or her life.

But from where do you think these influences come? It is the mother that is the primary source of everything a child can receive as he is growing up. Leonardo Da Vinci had already said this when he stated: *“A strong desire, a fear, a strong emotion felt by the mother, or a great pain in her soul, has more power over the child than on the mother.”*

During pregnancy, the child, immersed in amniotic fluid, is like a tape recorder that is turned on and recording everything that the mother does, thinks and feels, both consciously and unconsciously. Thus anything that can produce a sense of wellbeing, serenity and equilibrium in the mother will most certainly also benefit the child.

Today, science shows us that the antenatal baby is an intelligent and social being, needing affection and wanting a dialogue, attention, love, **equipped with surprising learning abilities.** In fact, starting from conception, every experience the child has becomes part of the structure around which his personality will be constructed and on which he will open up to the world.

It is you, mother, above all, who can help your child develop all his innate qualities, stimulating him in different ways that will help him in both his physical and psychological evolution, so that he will arrive at the moment of his birth with a rich baggage of positive experiences.

For example: stroking your stomach and talking gently to the child you will make him understand how much he is loved and wanted. Also your caresses will stimulate his nervous system. Singing to the baby is also very useful, because not only will the sweet songs you sing him give him the pleasure of hearing beautiful sounds, but also the vibrations that reach his ear – that after the fifth month will have reached its definitive form – will reach his brain, not only helping it to develop, but also fostering a love for music. **Mozart and Vivaldi are favoured composers, because they are very melodic.**

During your meditations and prayers, imagine that inside you he is in the lotus position. It will be good for your child, too, to be included in your moments of spiritual elevation. All through the day, give him every opportunity to participate in your thoughts and actions. If you have a hobby that you love, this is a good moment to cultivate it: painting, playing a musical instrument or any

other activity that you particularly enjoy. The father will also be able to participate here, stroking, speaking, singing...

All this will become part of the child's life experience that he will bring with him at the moment of birth, and its beneficial effects will emerge in later years.

Now, if the first phase is positive, so will the successive phases be. And it is on the basis of this principle that a pregnancy must be lived. Knowing that the growing foetus participates in everything, the mother will spontaneously commit herself to transmitting to the child the best possible physical and psychological nourishment to make him understand how much he is loved and accepted, and with how much respect Mummy and Daddy will accompany him day by day, looking forward to being able to hold him in their arms.

All this will facilitate the creation of **a strong antenatal bond between mother and child**: a fundamental condition for creating the basis for the health of both of them, a basis that will continue to work after the birth.

Love and joy are two indispensable elements for the wellbeing of the child. But neither must we forget to respect the work that is going on inside his body, thinking about the speed and wisdom with which the cells of his little body multiply, reaching the term of nine months with a complete and functional structure. It is a remarkable feat that we never think about, but that is miraculous.

For example: what happens at the moment of fertilization, when the two tiny cells, the ovum and the sperm, are united, is quite extraordinary. The cell that is thus created, containing all the genetic information coming from the mother and the father, creates two new cells, that in turn split to produce a multitude of cells. The new cells, though, are not all the same, and as they reproduce themselves they group together to form the various organs. As if by magic, every cell knows its place. Some come together to form the cardiac muscles, others become the nervous system, and so on. However, the genetic codes ensure that every cell develops 'in the right manner'. Other cells, when multiplying, go to build the placenta and the membranes that made up the amniotic sack around the foetus, to protect and isolate it. Besides, the placenta contains cells that derive directly from the mother, so this organ belongs to both mother and child.

Another example: consider the eyes, these two little slits in the child's face, that have a cover, the eyelid, to protect the bulb of the eye behind them. This bulb has the function of 'photographing' images to send through the optic nerve to the brain, which elaborates them in order to make it possible to 'see' the same images that the eye has photographed. Is this not stupendous? Immediately after birth, think of the wonder of this organ that permits you to exchange a first glance, to get to know each other, to give birth in both of you to the joy of that first encounter!

The most fascinating aspect of this first period of human life is that mother and foetus, even if they are united in the most intimate of physical relationships, are two distinct people, each with its own life project.

Another indispensable prerequisite is serenity, and it is the duty of the father, sharing in the wait for the child, to create around the mother an atmosphere of love, support, protection and serenity, making it possible for her to live her pregnancy in the full knowledge of her responsibilities towards the new baby and to adapt everything she does to the role she is undertaking.

Today we no longer talk of a link between mother and child, but of a Mother/Father/Child 'bonding'. In fact, the presence and involvement of the father is of extreme importance for the development of the child in every sense. And if also the father follows the development of the child in a conscious manner, the Mother/Father/Child bonding will take place right from the start, representing for the new being its first experience of love, and for the couple a consolidation of their union.

For the baby, the absence of a healthy affective relationship with its parents equals fear, and this is the cause of many traumas that emerge during the course of the existence, generating a lot of suffering.

Therefore, remember that the baby takes into account everything that happens in its surrounding environment. You, mother, must avoid anything that for you is unpleasant, irritating and not nice, so as to avoid any sensations reaching the child that may damage his growth. In France, some time ago, expectant mothers were even prohibited from going to the circus, lest they should experience moments of tension or fear.

It would be a good thing to manifest your love for your child stroking your stomach and accompanying your caresses with gentle words, singing sweet songs to him several times a day, preferably always the same ones, that the child will memorise. After he is born, in moments of agitation, hearing them and recognising them, he will become calm again. You can talk to him as if he were present. In the morning, when you go shopping, tell him about everything you are buying: bread, vegetables, fruit, sugar. Tell him what they are used for and always show him the positive side of things.

In difficult moments that you may have to face, it is well to explain to the child that they have nothing to do with him, and that he can continue to concentrate on his growth in all tranquillity, protected by the love of his mother and father that want him to remain serene. Simply explain to him that in life not everything always goes the way you would like it to, but that with a dose of goodwill everything sorts itself out. These words will help the child build a strong character, ready to face anything, but at the same time desirous of peace.

You too, father, can talk to and play with the baby. You can try tapping on the mother's stomach and you will get a kick in response. This game is fun, and, if repeated, must be done at a time that is convenient for the mother and father, because the child registers the time and, after he is born, will always demand to play at that same time.

This will all contribute to forming a strong bond between the three individuals, a bond that will last in time and will be at the base of a solid relationship with his parents when the child grows up. Children, although they need to grow up freely, need a solid reference point, and this can be provided best of all by a family that is loving, understanding and always available.

This, for a woman who is facing a pregnancy, is the moment in which she must become conscious of her extraordinary potential, which gives her the possibility to handle such an important role: that is giving the family, society and the whole world an individual healthy in both body and mind, capable of carrying within him healthy and constructive principles, to improve the quality of life of future generations.

For those wishing to read more we recommend:

"Life Before Birth and a Time to be Born: the Challenges of Fetal Development" by Peter. W. Nathanielsz - published by W H Freeman & Company

ALIMENTATION

Practical advice

First of all we had better get rid of the myth that says that “*an expectant mother must eat for two*”. There are two things she had better concentrate on:

- 1) The quality of the food, which must be free of preservatives, preferably come from biological cultivations and be unrefined;
- 2) Each day she should reach a total of about 2,000/2,500 calories.

During pregnancy, her daily calorie intake should never be less than 1,600, so as not to provoke a slow down of the growth of the child. This must be scrupulously followed especially during the final three months. Once breast feeding starts the diet should be integrated with a further 200 calories of milk, yoghurt or seasonal fruit.

It must be born in mind that the ideal diet for a pregnant woman should start well before conception, and continue through into the breast-feeding period. Thus the foundations for the future health of the child can be laid.

The waiting mother must therefore know what must and what must not be eaten during the nine months of pregnancy. This is important, as a poor diet can have a negative effect on the health of both the mother and the child. The rules to follow are simple. It will not be necessary to change one's eating habits; but it will be necessary to follow a diet that is as varied and balanced as possible.

The diet may include: pasta, cereals, meat, fish, poultry, vegetables, dairy products and fruit. If taken in reasonable proportions, these foods will supply a correct amount of protein, vitamins, carbohydrates, lipids (fats) and mineral salts to ensure the good health of mother and child. The diet should not be so monotonous that it removes the pleasure of meals, but neither should it be rich in elaborate dishes, such as fried foods and heavy sauces that are not easily digestible.

As far as increasing weight during pregnancy is concerned, a woman in good health, with a normal weight, should reach the end of the pregnancy with about an extra 9/12 kilograms, distributed as follows: 1 kg a month for the first three months and 1/1.5 Kg a month for the rest of the time.

The situation is different if the mother is overweight from the start. In this case it would be better to follow the advice of a doctor.

Obviously it will be important to follow the intake of proteins, fats, carbohydrates, vitamins, mineral salts, magnesium and calcium in the correct proportions.

This is all about physical health, which must be maintained in order to give the growing baby the purest substances and elements needed to guarantee the healthy growth of his body. But as well as all this we have to think about his mind. We often talk about being ‘healthy in body and mind’. So, what do we have to do?

Scientists have dedicated a lot of time to studying nutrition and they have discovered that food, as it is presented to us in nature, contains magical elements, capable of maintaining or even re-establishing our health, both physical and also mental. It cannot be denied that the problem of ‘food’ is at the basis of everything. This type of attitude towards food is nothing other than an instinct that men share with animals. Unfortunately, however, mankind has not yet understood the spiritual importance of food and how it should be assumed; in fact, we swallow it mechanically, thinking about other things, chatting and sometimes arguing. A meal taken in this atmosphere can only lead to a heavy stomach and tiredness.

Well then, how should we eat? The ideal way would be: before coming to the table, calm your mind and then eat in silence. When you put the first morsel of food in your mouth, consciously chew it at length, until it is liquid. Never forget the most important moment of any action is the

beginning, because it sends out the signal for the activation of certain specific energies. Thus, if we start in a harmonious manner, then so will the rest continue harmoniously.

It is a good thing to chew slowly and for a long time, not only to make the stomach's job easier, but also because the mouth, which is the first organ to receive the food, is an important laboratory as it also has a more elevated, subtle, almost spiritual function. On a more elevated plain, our mouth does not elaborate and transform just the material part of food – the starch into sugar, etc. – but it collects the etheric particles, the more subtle and powerful energies, those that give us strength, that give us life, those that directly feed our nervous system.

These are the etheric substances, those that give life to everything. Plants, earth, water, air, everything contains them and it is thanks to these particles that everything can grow and live, even stones. And, if the mother absorbs them, then so does the child.

For those who have never studied this field, you must know that the biological function takes place anyway, but it will be more efficient if accompanied by our awareness and by our gratitude. We never thank Mother Nature who takes care of everything for our good. Give thanks, all the time for everything that Nature offers us to keep us alive and well. Give thanks for the solid substances and also the subtle ones contained in food, give thanks for the variety of shapes, colours, flavours and aromas, always give thanks. Your child will also benefit and will thus learn to love Nature.

MASSAGE

The art of massage started with life, and belongs as much to mankind as it does in the animal kingdom. It is the most ancient, natural and instinctive method for regenerating the body and mind. Just think of the effect of a simple caress!

At the start of the 5th Century BC, Hippocrates, the father of western medicine, wrote: “*A doctor needs to know how to do many things, but most certainly he needs to know how to massage*”. From his studies of the effect of massage on his patients he wrote: “*...all doctors should include massage in their range of curative practices to favour health and longevity.*”

In every culture and in every epoch, massage has been used also during pregnancy, as well as a support during labour and during the birth itself, without ever forgetting its importance during the postpartum and as a communicating ‘language’ between mother and child.

During pregnancy, every mother, often subconsciously, massages her baby and lets herself be massaged by him, interpreting his needs and desires as expressed by his movements and position.

Touch is the most important of the five senses: consciousness of one’s self and one’s surroundings depend on it. It is touch that gives us a sense of the depth, thickness and shape of things that are outside our mind and body. Every emotion, before it reaches inside us, is filtered by the tactile sensors in our skin.

The sense of touch is the first to develop in the human embryo, after only eight weeks of pregnancy; when he is only three centimetres long, it only takes a slight pressure in the area where the lips will be to cause the baby to move his head.

The desire for physical contact and stimulation – a prime need in man - remains constant throughout life. As we grow, we discover new channels of communication, such as glances, smiles, words, but the need for skin contact remains strong even in adults.

Physical contact is the language that we use instinctively to express our feelings, to demonstrate to others that we love and respect them.

Through massage, not only do we respond to a primary need, but also we ‘open up’ physically and mentally to listening to the other person, favouring the rapid establishment of a relationship.

Massage performed with love recognises the language of the body and follows its natural rhythm: breathing, pauses, silences.... Massage is therefore a lesson that is lived and learnt on our skin; massage brings us into contact with our interiority and our needs.

Whatever our age may be, we all need tenderness and love, physical contact is one of the most potent means of communication, of giving and receiving.

It is today recognised that through the rediscovery of our body and the observation of the tensions that are blocking it, we can not only develop physical strength, but also improve the quality of life itself.

On the physiological plain, massage produces evident benefits: it improves and revitalises our muscle tone, loosens even deep tensions restoring a normally balanced state; it aids both blood

and lymphatic circulation, thus assisting our immune system. Furthermore, it has a calming effect on our nervous system, relaxing muscles, lowering blood pressure, favouring deeper more relaxed breathing.

Neither must we ignore the effects on an emotional level: massage reactivates and heightens sensitivity, energy and psychophysical well being, reducing stress, alleviating pains originating from tensions, aiding sleep and improving relationships between people. In fact, massage leads to respect, understanding, as well as reciprocal physical knowledge. We do not yet know with certainty what the mechanisms that provoke these psychophysical effects are, but without doubt an important part comes from the interaction between the masseur and the person being massaged.

Letting oneself be massaged means accepting the other person and opening up to them, entering a wonderful world of fusion that helps us love each other and ourselves.

A serene environment helps us live our pregnancy serenely; the greater the number of moments of wellbeing we experience, the more our child will experience, thus helping him to grow in physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual harmony.

Particular attention must be given to the couple that use massage in preparation for having a child. Reciprocal massage before conception helps the partners enter into harmony, opening up energy channels (chakra and meridian), permitting physical energy to flow in a balanced manner.

Rediscovering our own body and that of our partner cements our relationship, strengthens the union and uplifts the energy vibrations in both partners, setting the scene for the magical, luminous and unique moment of conception. Massage in preparation for conception is necessary for tuning the instruments (the organs), so that their harmonious 'notes' may give life to a loving 'melody', that will be the first cot, the first gift for your child. If we improve our relationship with our body, we will improve all its functions, including sexual and reproductive ones. Furthermore, as we have seen, there is a very close relationship between tactile communication and the ability to demonstrate love, both given and received.

The health and affective life of the child, a future adult, is fed primarily by contact and caresses from the mother, father, family and friends. This is our first food, and for the rest of our lives we shall love on the basis of this first *imprinting*.

It is important to realise that living sex as the act of procreation, in light and in love, is the first great gift that we can give to our children and to the whole of humanity.

Hands touch, slide, caress, explore curiously, following the paths of sentiment and transport. We let ourselves go, we open our hearts and 'dance' lightly to the sound of a melody we ourselves have created. While we massage, we recognise the child that is within us and within the other, we recognise its requests and its defences, we enter into the other person's heart, his world, we listen to his voice in respectful silence. We 'dialogue' with our 'feeling' and with that of our partner and, lovingly touching his body, we go down the path of joy. 'Feeling', which is a quality of the heart and the intuitive mind, is never wrong. Simply massage, use your hands and your experience, with love, and let everything happen naturally.

Starting with conception and continuing right through pregnancy women undergo numerous changes, on a physical, mental and spiritual level. The body takes on new shapes, their stomach expands to welcome the new growing being, that depends on the mother for absolutely everything. The mind experiments with new thoughts and new responsibilities, rediscovering a subtle link with

a more open mind. But the greatest change is on the sensorial energy plain: the woman is living an experience that brings her close to Divine Creation, and she is in a state of complete openness, of constant contact with her more subtle dimensions. The 'sixth sense' that every mother instinctively has is proof of this. The receptivity of both mother and child is so great that we feel as if we are witnessing a 'sensorial osmosis', understandable if we consider the deep unity that they form. These transformations are governed by the most archaic part of the brain, which acts on the biochemical plain modifying the level of endorphins produced. Recent research has shown that the area of the brain that receives emotions, the limbic lobes, is already completely developed in the foetus after the seventh week of its existence: this means that a child, when only a month and a half old, can already feel all emotions. This explains how the surrounding environment, the life of the mother, her values and behaviour, her thoughts and emotions, are all information that the child receives and that influence his development the functioning of his cells. The genetic capital of a child contains the personal experiences of the parents.

The role of massage during pregnancy is to accompany the woman, relaxing her, to listen to the memories of her mother's womb, building, as we said before, a bridge of physical, emotive and energy contact between the sensations felt by the mother and those felt by the child. In this manner the two protagonists of the pregnancy can come closer together, sense each other, listen to each other and ... even speak to each other. Furthermore, during the first three months, massage plays an important role on a physical level, pre-empting the small problems of that period, such as nausea, swelling and tiredness.

Just as the 'interior child' in each one of us lets himself be taken care of by an 'affective parent' (ideally one's own partner), so does the child let himself be taken care of by his parents, establishing a balanced and harmonious relationship with them. The couple, once they have learnt to massage, should dedicate a time every day to 'contact', cuddling and stroking. It is not a waste of time, because it means sharing the responsibility of co-creating a new being, dedicating the time necessary for getting to know him, to his growth and to loving him.

Every massage technique, if it comes from the heart, helps the future parents live to the full and in depth the first months of the pregnancy. Massage, with all its gentleness, is useful both for the person giving it and for the person receiving it: in this moment, the man, as he touches his woman, 'listens' to her and, at the same time, 'listens' to himself and together they 'listen' to their child. In this manner the future father has the possibility of facing up to the great changes that he is living and that usually leave him dazed, confused, and sometimes all too lonely.

During pregnancy, it is important that the mother receive a relaxing massage at least once a week, that will help her unblock, calm down, stretch out a body that is undergoing very rapid change. In this manner she will be able to attenuate and sometimes even eliminate back-pain, the collapse of tissues, tiredness and heaviness in her legs.

The second three months is the best period in which to deepen the mother-father-child relationship. The swollen stomach is now very visible and the father, touching it, stroking it and massaging it, enters into a relationship with his child; he no longer feels excluded as he did in the past, but, as is correct, he is a direct protagonist, active in the psychophysical development of his own child. The woman, in turn, no longer feels that she is the sole person responsible for events, but can share this experience with her partner. They both feel the same emotions, share the same 'listening', speak the same language, get to know and accept each other better. This is when the mother's massage of the child, which had already started on a mental and emotional level right from the first weeks, becomes more 'physical'. Now her hands can 'feel' the body 'contained' in her womb. The 'contact' for both mother and father is tangible.

During the final period of pregnancy, massage for women is concentrated on the lumbar region and the abdomen, which should be stroked and cuddled gently. Using techniques such as: finger pressure, moxa, reflexology, etc. – sometimes even speaking to the baby in the right manner inviting him to take up the encephalic position – it is possible even to influence the position of the baby as well as structural or functional problems the woman may have in the final months.

The lymphatic system and blood circulation, as well as the endocrine glands, so important for the success of the birth, are stimulated and energised by massage. The psychophysical sensitivity acquired in the preceding months, also thanks to massage, is now more necessary than ever for maintaining 'contact' with the baby to be born. The partner, or someone else for him, has already learnt where to touch to relax, where to press to stimulate, where to brush to lighten. The physical relationship that has been established in the triangle is now ready to be lived.

It is therefore opportune to maintain a weekly antenatal treatment and to dedicate more and more time to stimulation and contact with the child and with the partner.

Immediately after the birth, the mother should take the baby and settle him gently on her stomach. This vitally important 'skin to skin' contact finds in silence all its capacity for communication. The mother's hands, used to massage, to touch and tactile language, will know how to find the 'right rhythm' for calming, reassuring and loving.

SMOKE AND ALCOHOL

Smoke is always bad for your health, but the worst damage takes place when the mother smokes during pregnancy.

Smoking produces negative consequences for the intra-uterine environment and for the development of the foetus: bruising of the rear of the placenta, anomalies with the insertion of the placenta, anticipated births, low body weight of the baby at birth, retarded intra-uterine growth, behavioural anomalies and vascular damage to the retina. The latter affects both the arteries that become rigid and narrow and the veins that become tortuous and dilated. An increase in arterial blood pressure has been observed in babies exposed to the risk of ocular haemorrhages. Also, children appear to develop cancer more easily.

These anomalies are sufficient to demonstrate the intense suffering of the foetus that has to put up with the mother smoking. Furthermore, there is a higher instance of spontaneous abortions.

Studies carried out in Denmark have highlighted that mothers smoking during pregnancy increased the risk of infantile colic, that can provoke agitation and crying for several hours a day. This serious symptom, however, disappeared after about five or six months.

It has also been demonstrated that a mother that smokes has a higher probability of having a child that suffers from asthma.

But even more serious is the fact that children with mothers that continued to smoke during pregnancy have a higher rate of cot deaths.

The consequences of smoking during pregnancy are proportionally related to the number of daily cigarettes. We must also remember that if the mother smokes during pregnancy, the child will be that much more probable of 'taking up the vice' when he grows up.

For expectant mothers who have difficulty giving up, it is better to reduce the daily dose than to stop suddenly, to avoid unwanted psychological repercussions and withdrawal symptoms (agitation, unstable moods, trembling, insomnia, etc.). There are various ways to increase one's capacity to lose the addiction. In fact, to help a woman give up cigarettes, it is possible to resort to nicotine substitutes – pastels, chewing gum, pills – that can be taken even during breast-feeding.

N.B. Also passive smoke can cause all the above risks. Despite all this, two women in every ten (19.5%) continue to smoke during all or most of their pregnancy...

The damage provoked by alcohol is no less. We now know that the consumption of alcoholic beverages during pregnancy can seriously harm the growth of the baby. So as not to disturb his natural development, abolish all alcohol. In fact, four glasses a day or repeated cases of inebriation are enough to disturb the progress of the pregnancy. Alcohol can provoke deformities or mentally retarded children. All this would cause serious discomfort to the child (learning and socialisation problems). Abstinence is therefore recommended for the health of both mother and child.

It must always be clearly remembered that an influx of oxygen is of paramount importance for the serene and normal intrauterine growth of your baby!

SOUNDS AND MUSIC

“...everything is sound, nothing but sound. The stars are sound, their planets and their content. Elements belong to sound just as the things they form, from the simplest to the most complicated bodies: the plant world and the animal world. Humans are sound, even if they don't know it, or have forgotten it”.

SOUND

Right from the start, the embryo is immersed in a universe of sound that will accompany it through the nine months of pregnancy. Thus starts a musical massage that will help it to grow. The first attempt at ‘hearing’ that the embryo tries at just a few weeks is nothing other than a ‘vibrating caress’.

Inside the body of the mother a great number of sounds are propagated, creating a real rhythmic concert, enveloping and vital. First of all, there is the heart beat that ‘cradles’ the embryo with its constant and reassuring presence; then there is the flow of the blood, the sound of breathing and movements of the diaphragm, intestinal rumbles, the noise made by joints and the emptying of the stomach, these are all sound sources that stimulate the foetus.

Then there is the voice of the mother, that reaches the foetus inside the body itself, the first great generator of the mother/child relationship. It is not, therefore, strange to think that sound has such a stimulating effect on the development of the embryo and of its nervous system.

After the seventh month of pregnancy, the baby is truly able to hear sounds, but not all frequencies reach his ear. The amniotic fluid acts as a filter that allows only certain frequencies to penetrate from outside. Among the sounds the foetus can hear there are the very low ones and the very high ones. The baby in the uterus does not like excessively loud noises. There are cases of mothers who had to move away from excessively loud sound sources, forced to by their baby kicking in protest.

The moment when the mother feels the first movement of the baby marks a turning point in their relationship. She starts to speak to him in a more direct and meaningful way. And subsequently the sounds that reach him are without doubt more intense.

THE MOTHER'S WORLD OF SOUNDS

We have seen how the sounds produced by the mother fill the world of the foetus. Each and every one of these sounds is, for the baby, proof of the presence of its mother, a presence that does not only have a physiological and functional value, but is also loaded with deep emotive and affective values.

The mother's physical activities, her thoughts, the sensations she has and the emotions that she experiences are all reflected inside her body in the form of variable sounds. The acceleration of the heart beat and blood flow, the breathing rate and muscular contractions alter the rhythmic sound vibrations that envelop the baby, with which he empathically enters in tune and senses the variations. The mood of the mother and the tone of her vibrations are felt perfectly by the baby, so if the mother vibrates with joy, she also causes her baby to vibrate with joy, while calming herself down and reassuring herself after a strong emotion, she also calms and reassures the baby.

This is why it is so important to sing to the child, because it establishes a real assonance, in which sound is the intermediary that facilitates the relationship, dialogue and empathy.

Sound is the privileged vehicle of communication between mother and child.

In the last three months of pregnancy, when the baby's movements are more evident, her listening to herself as a mother transforms itself progressively into listening to the baby and her dialogue with him.

For the mother, it becomes easier and easier to realise that her child really does perceive, feel, hear. He receives sounds from his mother, but also many others from the outside world.

It is in this period that the baby activates the cognitive functions of the ear that recognise and memorise sounds. In fact, it has been demonstrated that he can recognise certain voices, to which he gives specific motor and physiological responses (accelerated heart beat) and he seems to prefer certain types of music to others.

One thing is certain: once the baby is born he can perfectly recognise music heard frequently in the womb, to which he often reacts relaxing and calming down, as if they brought him back to the protected and welcoming world of the maternal womb.

Summarising, we can state that the mother vibrates for her child like a musical instrument, thus offering him her energy and poetry, while he vibrates in a dialogue of sound that renders them both people united in sound, a dialogue that is the sound cradle of life.

AND THE FATHER?

Fathers also vibrate profoundly in unison with their babies. The nine months are a period of gestation also for them, a time and a path that are necessary for progressing from the identity of man to that of father.

The sounds produced by the man are indispensable for the successful progress of the gestation and a perfect equilibrium of the growth of the baby in the mother's womb.

Just as the mother, in the true sense of the word, incorporates the baby into herself physically, so the father 'incorporates' him in his psychic and imaginary nucleus, wrapping him in a kind of mental and affective embrace.

The father's thinking about his child and loving him becomes a subtle 'music' that reaches the foetus, preparing for him the best possible of all receptions. But if these thoughts and this love are transformed into words, then the acceptance becomes a true early bond, in which father and son really can perceive each other and resonate together.

We know that it is low frequencies that most easily reach the foetus through the filter of the amniotic fluid. Male voices are comfortably in this frequency range and therefore the baby can easily hear his father's voice. The clearest perception is when the voice is at about 10-20 centimetres from the stomach. So the father can speak close up to the baby, sing to him, and if to the sound of the voice he adds the physical contact of a hand resting on the mother's stomach, his presence will be even more direct and welcomed. Then the foetus will not fail to respond, with both physiological and motor responses, some of which will be very evident, such as little kicks and summersaults, which permit the baby to get closer to the point of sound and contact. This can become the first fun game to play with Daddy!

It has been observed that the lower frequencies vibrate in the lower part of the body, particularly in the muscles and bones, while the higher frequencies vibrate in the upper part and in the nervous system. Therefore, we could say that the male voice contributes to the consolidation of the physical structure of the child, offering strength and stability to the growing body.

The sound of the paternal voice is important also because it offers a first portal towards an external reality. While the sounds of the womb and the mother's voice help the foetus to gradually differentiate itself from the fluid environment surrounding it, and help it achieve an identity of itself as a being separate from its mother, the voice of the father is the first vibrating and affective sound to reach it from the outside, opening up the doors that separate the outside from the inside, and welcoming it invitingly to the life that awaits it. Once the child is born, he will recognise this voice among all the others and he will know that a bond has already been moulded.

MUSIC AND SONG DURING PREGNANCY

During pregnancy it is a good idea to pursue artistic and expressive activities. Given the importance of sound in the process of gestation, singing and music are among the most recommended activities.

Every human being possesses a specific characterising 'sound identity'. This means that we each resonate to certain musical styles rather than others, giving preference to our own manner of expressing ourselves. Many mothers are conscious of the fact that they listen to certain types of music not only because they like them, but also because they please the baby.

Getting used to communicating with sounds, with our body, with glances, means amplifying our vocabulary extensively, using an intuitive and affective language that will later be the basis for our communication system with our child.

Song is life, and no mother sings out of key for her own child. During vocal emissions our whole body starts vibrating. Sound vibrations help the relaxation of tissues and provoke auto analgesia. But the human voice is not just pure sound frequencies and vibrations, but is loaded with an affective and emotive charge that renders it precious.

Obviously, these processes take place automatically, beyond our conscience, but it is still interesting to know them and to know that a vibrating voice filled with love can resonate with and provoke movement in the being inside.

Summing up:

- Music aids the development of an open, sociable, cooperative and tolerant character well disposed towards others.
- Music is a cultural richness that will give the child a social identity and a reassuring sense of belonging and at the same time a possibility of coming closer to other cultures with an open mind and tolerance.
- Make music with your child. Listen to a lot of music, but above all sing with him, because no recording can replace the vitality and affective significance of the voice.
- Play, improvise, invent and create music.
- Live a harmonious and musical life!

THE IMPORTANCE OF COLOURS

Every mother knows that she can communicate and talk to her baby as if he were already born. If she does, she will create the best possible conditions for the birth of a balanced, healthy and energetic child. Along with the importance of good food, abundant cuddles and performing the exercises described above, the mother can also add **the influence of the colours of the rainbow**. In fact, it is possible to transmit the virtues of colours to the child in the womb. And if the future mother manifests these virtues on a daily basis, they will be imprinted into the baby's cellular structure.

Here is the complete list:

RED	The colour of life, vitality, dynamism and will power.
ORANGE	The colour of health, joy, interior beauty and transformation.
YELLOW	It corresponds to intelligence, wisdom and reason.
GREEN	It is connected to growth, hope, abundance and success.
BLUE	The colour of interior peace, music, truth and harmony.
INDIGO	It develops noble thoughts, loyalty, stability and self-control.
VIOLET	It inspires purity, develops imagination and intuition, exhorts to altruism and compassion. It is tied to the spiritual values of human beings.

When you have a free moment, **sit in a quiet place and relax deeply**. When you are ready, open your heart and let all your love for your child flow out. If at the end of each exercise you try to listen, you will perceive what he wants to tell.

Breathe in and out slowly, as if you wanted to inhale the scent of a flower. Then continue, imagining a shaft of white light wrapping itself right around you. This light will put you in the right frame of mind to perform the following exercises.

Imagine that you are admiring a red, luminous and sparkling flower. Breathe in the colour. Live this beautiful red intensely, it will go on to impregnate the cells of your baby, feeding him with love and energy. Imagine him already born, running and playing joyfully. He will be a cheerful and confident child.

Now immerse yourself together with your baby in the colour orange. This wave of colour will rise up from below to cover every part of your body. Breathing in this colour, send your vibrations to your child, listing all the wonderful qualities you wish him to have. Add the most beautiful expressions that burst from your heart to give him the pleasure of participating. This will be a precious stimulus for your baby.

Continue with commitment and a new colour every day, the one that inspires you most at the moment and stimulates your imagination to create a fascinating setting and fosters beautiful images in your imagination. They will be the ones that will also please your child.

For the colours:

- Yellow you could choose sunrise
- Green the awakening of nature
- Blue a clear sky
- Indigo sunset, as night is descending
- Violet a shaft of pure and vibrating light wrapping itself around you in a spiral

You may wish to choose some music to accompany these exercises, preferably Mozart or Vivaldi, always, however, in a major key.

Your clothes should also always be in rich colours. Colours are vibrations, while black does not emit vibrations but absorbs everything, including negative vibrations.

LABOUR AND DELIVERY

The long months of the pregnancy are coming to an end. The birth is now imminent and in the final days of waiting there is the atmosphere of a dress rehearsal. The baby is getting ready to enter the world and it is he, with the assistance of his mother, who initiates labour.

About three or four weeks before the birth – a very variable period – the baby places itself head down, moving closer to the uterus.

He moves less now, due to a reduced amount of space available; nonetheless a minimum of movement is necessary to signal that as the great moment arrives the baby is well.

The mother's organism secretes a series of hormones, secretions in which the baby participates. The hormones are those that will set off labour. The principle hormone is the **oxytocin** produced by both mother and child. This proves that during this important phase there is, between the two, a perfect and wonderful collaboration.

For the baby, it is not a question of preparing himself only for the huge physical effort of overcoming the difficulties of passing through the birth channel, but also for his encounter with a totally new environment he will have to adapt to.

For the woman, this series of hormones sets off labour, initially with light contractions at long intervals that progressively intensify in pain and frequency. This phase can have a varied duration, but the woman knows that she must be brave and face up to this process; however, everyone has their own rhythm and the people with them have to understand and respect this...

Depending on the interpretation one gives to pain, it can be said that the more we assign a meaning to it, the more we are able to raise our pain bearing threshold. Understanding the significance of birth pains gives us good reasons for accepting and experiencing this deeply psychological and physical moment, which has nothing pathological about it.

The medical world, with its "avoid pain" ethos, tends to distance women from their bodies, putting distance between them and their sensations, denying them feelings, knowledge and expression. Women should, on the other hand, know that their body is perfectly adapted to the function of childbirth, just as it is for any other function: breathing, digesting...

The way labour should be experienced is often the objective of courses preparing you for giving birth, guiding the woman towards giving herself an explanation for the pain, thus tending to dispel fears and tensions. Giving a positive interpretation to the pains of childbirth means transforming them and living them actively as a moment of growth, and not submitting to them as if they were a punishment.

"...Ok, everything is ready: lights dimmed, background music, relaxed concentration... The baby can come... Here he is! First his head comes out, then his arms... The baby is born! What better place to put him than on his mother's stomach! The mother's stomach has the exact shape and size of the baby. Convex a moment ago, now concave, it looks as if it is waiting, like a nest. Its warmth, its elasticity, the fact that it goes up and down with the breathing rhythm, the gentleness, the live heat of the skin, everything combines to make it the ideal place to place the baby." (F. Leboyer – Birth Without Violence)

This is the correct way to "welcome" the tiny being that has come to join our society. In fact, it would be beautiful if the birth of every individual were viewed as an act regarded as being sacred, with all the people involved understanding its value to the full. The hands of the Obstetrician that bring that small defenceless being into the world should receive him with love and tenderness, respecting the dignity of this being that, once adult, will have to carry out the duty for which it has come into the world and... 'become a harmonious note in the great universal symphony'.

Joy and relief all round, especially for the mum and dad who will be living the first moments in the presence of their child in an atmosphere of great intimacy. This will be a moment of deep general emotion!

It is important that the flow of oxygen through the umbilical cord continues until the baby is able to breathe on his own. To assist this important function, there are the hands of the mother that, with great tenderness, will lightly massage the baby's chest, to help it activate its breathing system and thus render it independent of the umbilical cord that still ties them together. This will have to be cut in a precise point a few centimetres from the navel, and only when it stops pulsing and the baby is breathing autonomously. Ideally, the cord should be cut by the father, who will have been following the birth with deep participation and giving great comfort to the mother.

Once the umbilical cord has been severed, the baby must not be taken away from the mother. Close to her, in this moment of passage from foetus to baby, it will feel safer, while its brain will be rapidly adapting all the circuits that govern the functions of its tiny organism to its new environment.

Recently, an Australian gynaecologist has spoken about a system whereby the umbilical cord is not severed, but left attached to the baby together with the placenta for a few days, until all the blood and hormones it contains have flowed into the baby, so as not to deprive it of an important quantity of blood and hormones, that would otherwise be lost. This new procedure is known as the "Lotus-Birth". Once the umbilical cord is empty it dries up and detaches itself from the navel. Apparently, this is very beneficial for the baby, which shows evident signs of wellbeing.

As soon as it is born, therefore, the baby is placed on its mother's stomach, from where it will tend instinctively to move towards the breasts. Apparently the smell of maternal milk is very similar to that of the amniotic fluid, so the baby tends instinctively towards something he already knows.

It is now that both their dreams come true: the baby is placed in its mother's arms for its first breast feed, and this is a moment rich with emotions when the eyes of the mother meet those of the child. At last, the baby sees its mother's eyes, and the mother is at last holding in her arms the baby she has carried in her womb for so many months, and on which she can pour out all her love and give it the nourishment that will make it grow up strong and healthy.

It would be useful for all pregnant women to know that during the entire process they have the benefit of a precious and wise collaborator and supporter who is assisting them: **NATURE**. In fact, Nature has thought of everything, down to the minutest detail, whether the mother is conscious of it or not. It has even thought about the secretion of certain hormones at the moment of birth such as: **oxytocin = the hormone of love, endorfin = the hormone of joy and adrenalin = the hormone of strength**. These hormones contribute to transforming the moment of the meeting between mother and child into an unforgettable experience that lays the foundation for their entire future relationship.

Should the process be disturbed by some slight complication, as sometimes happens, there is another great assistant at hand: **MEDICINE**. In recent decades, Medicine has created some truly exceptional techniques and sophisticated apparatus capable of solving even the most difficult situations: induced labour, epidural anaesthetics, caesarean births and more, **techniques that should however be used only in cases of absolute necessity**, in as much as, though valuable at the opportune moment, **they are not free of consequences which become apparent even after some time**. It will therefore be necessary to judge if they are necessary case by case.

DELIVERY AT HOME

The most important of all transformations is the birth of a new being. First there is a woman with a large stomach and then there is a mother with her child. First there is a daughter and then there is a mother. This is a visible reality, and every time that we see it before us, it provokes wonder.

To speak of *giving birth at home* is, for the couple, an important choice, preferring one's home and one's personal intimacy to the maternity ward; however, given the complexity of such a deep experience, rich with emotions, as is giving birth to your own child, taking such a decision is not an easy task, despite all the positive aspects it presents.

The woman who prefers to give birth at home, generally wishes to live this event totally naturally. It goes without saying that giving birth at home is an option only for women who have had a normal pregnancy and for whom no complications during the birth are foreseen.

Today, it is not rare to meet women who have programmed to give birth at home, where, staying in their own environment, they feel more at ease, surrounded by the care and love of the people that are assisting and supporting them.

The space where the birth will take place must be equipped with instruments such as a birthing chair, handles to hang onto and other things, where the woman, together with the obstetrician and hopefully her partner, can decide how to manage her labour and can choose the position she wants to be in, respecting her own timing and that of the baby. Everything must follow nature, in a quiet environment, with dimmed lights and soft background music.

A woman giving birth in such an atmosphere, in which every step is sacred, at the end is proud and happy to have lived the birth in the most natural manner possible, relying only on her own strength and following her own instinct. Women already know everything. They only need somebody to be present to intervene in case of need. Also obstetricians get great satisfaction from assisting women that manage themselves, simply reassured by their professional but also loving presence. It is not important if, in these situations, everything takes longer, provided it all ends well.

Today, there are hospital structures equipped for natural births, in which an effort is made to create a tranquil environment, not filled with equipment, where, next to the delivery room, there is a bedroom, furnished as it would be at home and where the mother can stay for a short period with her baby and her partner.

In this context, the role of the obstetrician takes on particular importance, not only as a helper and support during childbirth, but also before and after and with whom it is well not just to establish confidentiality, but above all a deep sense of trust.

DELIVERY IN WATER

*'Water has always been the symbol of motherhood in every place and time.
Life started in water and, in the amniotic fluid, we recapture the story of life.'*

Michel Odent

Water is the absolute female element and it is the source of life. It contains, supports, caresses, massages and evokes pleasant and relaxing thoughts.

At the right temperature, water helps us enter a state of sensory wellbeing, letting ourselves go without defences. Therefore, it will simply be enough to 'let ourselves go' to enjoy a pleasant state of relaxation.

During pregnancy, water has an even more pleasantly deep and effective impact, also because we are already in a natural state of openness and expansion.

Giving birth in water does not eliminate the pain, but it generally reduces it to a very low level. Also, the baby who is being born benefits of various advantages, one of which is the welcome he receives, that takes place in a more relaxed and distended atmosphere. Here too, the positive aspects outweigh the negative ones, but nonetheless we must not underestimate the problems that could arise.

A well known French gynaecologist who studies birth in water – Michel Odent – recommends not planning a water birth as a matter of course, as whether it is opportune and how it will take place should be discussed from case to case with the assisting obstetric team.

For a pregnant woman, giving birth is like an exam to be passed. Like any exam to be faced, it requires adequate preparation. Once it has been well prepared, the process of giving birth brings with it a certain dose of initial tension and a great deal of concentration. Furthermore, it requires an amount of physical and psychological energy; but once completed, together with tiredness, one is overcome by a sense of joy and satisfaction for the result obtained.

If the woman can get through the nine months without problems, she will reach the moment of the birth with greater serenity and security, and the birth will certainly go well. Furthermore, preparing herself, the woman indirectly also prepares her baby. It is always a delicate moment for both of them. One must therefore try to create the best conditions for the birth to take place in the best possible manner. And water, in this situation, can be of great assistance for both mother and child.

For the woman, water assists relaxation and isolation from external stimulation, thus facilitating communication with her intimate self, with her instinctive potential, with the resources and knowledge necessary for giving birth, knowledge that the woman has in her baggage of information. Giving birth, in fact, is a physiological and not a pathological process and, as such, it is inscribed in women's genetic patrimony.

Thus, water helps women transcend their rational self and abandon themselves to their instinct, to that primitive wisdom thanks to which they know what they have to do and how they have to do it for the experience to end happily.

For the child, the passage from the liquid environment of its mother's womb to an external liquid environment is certainly gentler and less traumatic.

Water takes on an even deeper significance if we consider birth as a sacred event.

The immersion of a woman in water during all her pregnancy and then during labour acquires a ritual value that fosters her spiritual and psychological transformation. Immersion can be seen as the purification and preparation that precede the celebration of the birth, seen as a sacred event. If the woman and those assisting her in the birth fully understand this concept, then the child will be welcomed into an atmosphere of respect and solemnity.

Water is without doubt an element of great value, with great potential during labour and childbirth. Nonetheless, women must not feel obliged to use it, but must do exclusively what they feel they want to do, following their own instinct.

THE DILATION PHASE.

The quality of the environment is very important; it should be as welcoming as possible, silent, intimate and tranquil, with few people present, with suffused lighting and quiet background music.

Labour starts when the hormones that stimulate uterine contractions are produced. Every labour has its own rhythm and the overall duration varies.

Experience has taught us that the best moment to enter the water is when the contractions become more intense and the intervals of rest shorten.

Immersion in water really can give considerable advantages. Not only does it have a relaxing effect, stimulating dilation, but it also shortens the period of labour.

The almost total absence of gravity makes it possible to save energy and strength. It is a wise thing to save one's strength at the beginning, with calm movements, slow breathing and resting between contractions. Everything we save at the beginning will come in useful at the end.

Water does not guarantee painless labour, but it helps reduce suffering. The feeling of warmth and the contact of the water on the skin help to modify the perception of pain, rendering it more bearable. The subsequent release of endorphins provokes a feeling of wellbeing.

Between one contraction and the next, water assists energy recovery, thus increasing the chances of completing the birth without external interventions.

The baby also contributes to the contractions by moving during labour, thus playing stimulating an active role. Just as the mother does, the baby secretes endorphins that help reduce pain, anxiety and fear. The mother, on her part, can talk to the baby and send him reassuring messages, preparing him for what is yet to come and helping him understand that all is well, also telling him how much she is looking forward to seeing him. The influence is reciprocal and sometimes it is the mother who is reassured by the baby!

THE EXPULSION PHASE.

Some people prefer to give birth out of the water. This is usually the case for people who have a protracted and extenuating expulsion phase, or for women who feel a reduced efficiency of the expulsion reflex, due to the relaxing effect of the hot water and the hydrostatic pressure.

If, on the other hand, the woman is in the water when the expulsion contractions start, there is no need for her to get out.

If the child is born in the water, he continues to breathe through the umbilical cord. Gently raised to the surface, the child comes into contact with the mother, face downwards to favour the expulsion of the amniotic fluid from the lungs. The face must stay above water to favour the start of breathing, while the tiny body remains immersed, thus making the entry into the world of gravity more gradual.

Both in the water and out, it is well not to cut the umbilical cord immediately, but to wait for the breathing of the lungs to be completely established. The umbilical cord can be cut when it becomes pale and stops pulsating. When it stops pulsating, a small, flat, white mark appears on the surface, a few centimetres from the baby's navel. The ends of the mark are tied with silk and the mark is cut in half, using the silk thread.

As soon as he starts to breathe, the baby is brought to his mother's breast. This usually happens spontaneously, as the baby is born with the natural instinct to search for his mother's breast. The suction stimulates new contractions that provoke the detachment of the placenta from

the wall of the womb, so that it may be expelled together with the membranes of the amniotic sack. These contractions will also reduce the uterus to its normal dimensions.

Now the mother can rest and relax with her baby in her arms.

CAESAREAN BIRTH

In the life of every woman, giving birth is a delicate moment that must be viewed as the end of a path rich in physical and psychological changes. In fact, during pregnancy an interaction starts between the expectant mother and the baby that is growing inside her.

In the first moments after birth, it will be very important for the woman to be able to see and touch the baby, to be able to lay the foundation with this first contact for the future of their affective relationship.

Sometimes, however, it is necessary to resort to surgery that in recent years has perfected techniques that really can resolve even the most complicated situations.

Caesarean births are surgical operations that make it possible to extract the baby via the abdomen, it not being possible to have a natural birth. When an urgent rapid completion of the birth is necessary or when the vaginal route is not advisable, a caesarean birth is advisable and justified. It is, however, a method of giving birth that cannot always be decided in advance. In fact, it is resorted to when labour is already underway, when it is realised that the baby is not in a condition to face the various phases of labour and birth, due to alterations in the cardiogram tracking.

In the case of a caesarean cut, two different forms of anaesthesia can be chosen: a total anaesthetic or an epidural. An epidural is performed by injecting an analgesic into the base of the spine. This renders the abdomen from the navel downwards completely insensitive, making it possible for the mother to have immediate contact with her child, as, remaining awake, she will be able to follow the birth of her child, as she would in a spontaneous birth. In this case the mother will be able to hold her child to her breast from the first moment.

During the operation a sterile cloth is placed between the mother and the operating area, so that she will not be able to see the surgical procedures. Although total unconsciousness is avoided, the woman loses all sensation in her genital region, thus creating a very delicate moment that has to be overcome.

Total anaesthetics are used in urgent cases such as severe foetal suffering. Whatever type of anaesthesia is used, due to the use of the anaesthetic itself, the baby will show signs of increased breathing stress syndrome and neo-natal depression.

The continued increase of women resorting to caesarean births has led to a need for reflection on the emotive implications that such a choice can bring about. The majority of women say that they have never thought of having a caesarean birth during pregnancy, certain in the knowledge that a good pregnancy would be followed by a natural birth without any complications.

In some cases, the fact that they had not participated in the event seems to have created some difficulties in the recognition of the baby as their own child.

Some women, on first meeting the child, express doubts about details that are part of the physicality of the new born baby: the shape of the body, the size seems to be out of proportion with the space available in their womb.

This type of birth has passive connotations, which increase the feelings of inadequacy of the many new mothers.

In some cases, women who have previously lived the experience of a natural birth define the suffering of the actual birth as constructive and give a significance to the pain, as opposed to the feeling of uselessness of post-surgical pain. They all say that with a natural birth you suffer a lot more before, but immediately afterwards you feel better and have more time to look after the baby.

The temporary invalidity that stops them from performing this primary need makes the recovery of physical shape become an important objective to be reached. Being together in the same room as mothers who have had a natural birth leads to continued comparisons of one's own difficulties in taking care of the baby with the same ease as the others. This accentuates further the self-perception of being temporarily inadequate mothers. This leads them to seek a continued

contact with the child, a contact that will permit a rapid and compensatory recovery of what has been lost in the operating theatre.

Breast-feeding takes on fundamental importance in the effort of establishing a relationship with the newborn baby. Furthermore, a real conflict starts between the needs of the baby and the healing of the surgical wounds of the mother, a conflict that is difficult to face. The need to emerge from a state of temporary invalidity denotes the need to recover something that has been lost or has never been experienced. In these cases, many women feel a strong need to be cuddled, cared for and nourished with tenderness just like their babies.

Depending on the causes that made the intervention necessary, also labour takes on a different connotation. In cases where complications of various nature arise, but which in themselves do not represent an immediate danger, when talking about labour mothers speak a lot about personal physical suffering and emotive impatience. But as soon as the safety of the baby is threatened, the suffering and safety of the mother take second place.

The safety of the baby is repeatedly highlighted as a primary need and at the same time it is used as a justification and means of acceptance of the surgical intervention. In certain cases, the caesarean is considered the lesser of two evils compared to the far riskier alternatives, such as forceps or suction.

From the moment in which they are informed of the need for a caesarean and the intervention itself, several weeks can pass, giving the women concerned time to imagine what might have happened. Nonetheless, admission to hospital, which takes place a few days early, has a tranquilising effect on them. Also getting acquainted with the environment and the staff contribute to a good level of acceptance and apparent tranquillity.

In the case of an epidural anaesthetic, being able to follow the operation consciously leads to being able to see the movements of the doctors; hearing their procedural communications and hearing the names of the surgical instruments increases considerably the level of anxiety of the patient and makes the intervention seem interminable. Furthermore, the gradual loss of mobility of the lower limbs that this type of anaesthetic provokes, evokes anguished fantasies about a state of invalidity that go well beyond the moment of the operation itself. Also, the residual tactile feeling makes it possible to partially feel the contact of the surgical instruments. Most women consider this uncomfortable, but it can give one the possibility of perceiving the moment of the extraction-birth. However, the type of anaesthetic considerably conditions the timing and modality of the first contact with the baby.

A total anaesthetic postpones this moment by several hours. A feeling of confusion and a growing sensation of pain accompany the awakening. The first maternal preoccupation is to know if the baby is all right, but the desire to see him immediately, even if expressed verbally, passes into second place due to the impediments of the post operation phase. In fact, some mothers expressly ask not to see their baby until the day after, because they say that they do not feel in the proper conditions to welcome him.

The epidural anaesthetic makes it possible for the mother to follow the event and to see the baby the moment it is born. This condition is not, however, lived as one might expect. In fact, all the women complained that the meeting lasts only a few seconds and in conditions that make it impossible to have any real contact.

The brevity of the encounter disappoints the patients expectations about the possibility of experiencing, thanks to the epidural, some of the specific moments of a natural birth, such as breast feeding and physical contact.

The different means of recovery from the two types of anaesthetic do not, though, determine significant differences regarding the recognition of the newborn baby and the initial relationship. It has been demonstrated that patients who have had an epidural also demonstrate incredulity and difficulty in recognising the child as their own.

All the women interviewed consider the first true meeting with the baby to be the first physical contact. It is as if the weight, the warmth emanated by the body and the skin contact, represent the privileged sensory communication channel on the basis of which the first primary relationship is formed.

From the statements made by the women it thus emerges that this intervention is lived as the deprivation of a fundamental experience, as the negation of important aspects and as an obstacle to the acquisition of a maternal role.

The insurmountable gap of a missed experience, of a missed expectation or of a fantasy that did not materialise leaves a space in which an important emotional unease can remain dormant, or grown in the bosom of the primary relationship between mother and child.

It has to be said, however, that caesarean births are welcome only in cases where the safety of the mother or child is at risk.

Text taken from the graduation thesis in Clinical Psychology by Simona Franceschini at the university of Turin.

WELCOMING THE BABY IMMEDIATELY AFTER BIRTH

Welcoming the baby immediately after birth is equally important as conception.

This is especially true for gynaecologists, obstetricians, psychologists, midwives and future mothers.

First of all, in the delivery-room there should reign silence, suffused light, the presence of people should be reduced to a minimum of 3: the future mother, the midwife and the partner, the future father, should he want to participate. Doctors should intervene only if necessary. A sweet music, chosen by the parturient, creates an atmosphere of privacy. Privacy to be respected in all ways, avoiding any source of potential distraction.

It is well known that the instinctive functions making possible a spontaneous labour and delivery are ruled by the primitive brain. While the woman is living this phase, the new part of the brain (neocortex) should absolutely not be stimulated. Any interference that forces the woman to think rationally or that awakens in herself the feeling of being in danger, could brake the spell. Even a single disturbing factor could cause the temporary or total interruption of labour, often causing medical or pharmacological intervention.

Since the birthing process has become of medical competence and maternity departments have been created, some severe rules have been settled. These impose, immediately after birth, to cut the umbilical cord and to carry the new born creature away from mother in order to let her rest and to submitting the baby to a number of tests and controls. Such severe rules, if applied indiscriminately, could have later negative consequences, as it is well shown by the research in primal health. Luckily, hospitals and midwives who modernize their protocols are increasing, allowing the immediate meeting mother/baby, which is absolutely the right thing to do. There are good reasons to respect this moment, to allow it to become a real sacred event. At the same time the “**imprinting**” takes place, the same imprinting that will exercise its beneficial function all life through.

I warmly recommend all Mothers to live this first moments very intensively, since it is truly “shaping” the existence of the baby, of themselves and of the whole family. The entire society will then benefit.

As soon as the baby is born, it will be put on Mother’s tummy, wherefrom the baby itself will try to conquer Mummy’s breast. At this point, with the umbilical cord still entire, the baby will be put in Mother’s arms, living in that way a brief moment of deep silence and of subtle communication. Mother and Father will make a brief ritual of introduction, pronouncing loving expressions of reciprocal recognition and of reciprocal belonging. **The baby, welcomed in that way, will receive an indelible imprinting which will last for ever.**

At the same time, Mother and baby will secrete a hormone ‘*oxitocine*’ which will help the reciprocal recognition and let grow in them a reciprocal attachment.

This sweet meeting will last until also the placenta will be born, after which the umbilical cord can be cut, but only in the point where a clear zone makes itself visible. Generally, the cut is a task which belongs to the Father.

When all this is not performed, because the new born baby, immediately separate from the umbilical cord and wrapped up in a blanket, is brought away from the delivery-room for being

examined and controlled, the sudden separation from his Mother leaves in the baby a very painful emptiness. Now, fortunately, things are changing, but still too slowly.

Try to imagine to find yourself in the situation of a newly born being who, after a hard effort to arrive at the end of that narrow and fatiguing way, finds itself suddenly in the hands of strange people who don't even show it to its Mother. (This is the way things happened for many years in all maternity clinics).

As a matter of fact, the sudden passage from being a foetus, entirely dependent from his Mother, to a newly born baby, arrived in a completely new surrounding, unrolls itself within a few minutes. In that short time, in the brain of the child all circuits must be changed for obtaining the possibility to breath, to suck, to see.... This is a dramatic change, rapid, intense, and in that moment, where could the baby find itself more safe and protected than in Mother's arms ?

Furthermore, one should not forget that the baby, when it is born, still belongs to the world from which it arrives, therefore it is necessary to help it to enter sweetly in the world of gravity. And, who could help it better than its Mother ?

A further very important point that must be kept in mind is the fact that the baby, at his birth, is still included in the energetic field (aura) of its mother, being still one body with her. This is another reason why the baby should be kept day and night in contact with its Mother, because it is still part of her at all levels. Until the energetic field has been built around the baby, it should stay as long as possible in contact with its mother, because, physically (fed with mother's milk) as well as under other aspects, Mother and baby are still one body, exactly as during pregnancy. In fact, one should probably consider pregnancy: 9 months in and 9 months outside.

The energetic field of the baby is forming itself slowly during the first months after birth, and, when the baby feels itself ready, after having been carried continuously in contact with its Mother for many months, it will manifest itself the wish to be put down to start exploring the world, still returning to Mummy when it feels the need of her, to a Mummy always ready to satisfy its needs.

The cut of the umbilical cord requires great care. The cord, which connects the baby to the placenta – source of all substances necessary for his development – is still part of his foetal structure. Therefore, to practice quickly the cut causes a strong pain, equal to an amputation. This is why the cut should be performed only in the above mentioned clear zone, because only then the function of the cord is concluded.

Another reason why the baby should not be carried away from his Mother immediately after birth, is because, from Mother's breast it receives the colostrum, the first milk, that gives it all the immunizing substances that will protect it from the bacterial flora passed to it staying in contact with his Mother. Other people would pass him other kinds of bacteria which would request other immunizing substances. At the same time, he sucking facilitates the birth of the placenta. This is a very important point.

I did non yet tell you what could happen during the course of baby's life if the brief 'imprinting' has not be performed.

The baby, carried away from its Mother, cries and is desperate, because it feels itself abandoned. It calls, but mother does not come to help it. This brings the baby to desperation, until

it stops crying because exhausted and deluded. “I need so urgently my Mother, but she does not come !” This is the way how in baby’s psyche are stored fear, abandonment, hate and delusions. All feelings which will later reappear and manifest themselves in a variety of forms, even violent, because in the unconscious of the little creature has remained permanent the pain of the deep wound it experienced . For this reason, the baby gets the first auto-consolation putting the thumb in its mouth .This represents for the baby the substitution of mother’s breast. Then a strong affection for a little bear, to keep tight on oneself day and night. Growing, it develops the greedy desire of food, of sweets... and than smoke, alcohol.....until it discovers drugs, at the beginning light and later heavy, besides a serial of entertainments that newspapers tell us daily. Also a variety of character properties, which make life difficult for the person itself and for those living around. **All these feelings of revenge are intended to fill that terrible initial emptiness, that painful separation remained hidden in the unconscious, but always present.**

Should this not be possible due to important reasons (caesarean, epidural anaesthesia or other complications), the left emptiness can be filled even later if the Mother will keep the baby always in contact with herself, day and night, showing it tenderness and all her love, intended to fill that terrible initial emptiness created itself at the moment in which it was not possible to do otherwise. The Mother can talk to the baby and tell him all she would have liked to do, giving it all explanations she wants to give it. The baby will not understand the words, but it will receive the flux of tenderness and of love which do not know obstacles. As far as possible this will avoid all painful consequences for the baby, for the family and for society.

An advise for all future Mothers : when choosing the clinic where to have your baby, be sure that the protocol mentions the right treatment at the birth of the baby to avoid the above problems. Furthermore, the new born baby should remain all the time near his Mother, where he can be observed and caressed and where Mum will learn to know it, for letting grow that strong feeling that will remain living in both for the whole life. And if the protocol of the clinic lists different things, please, don’t hesitate to pretend all what you consider best.

The knowledge of all the described details and their diffused application could really contribute to give birth to healthy and equilibrated creatures, ready for a better life. The future generations, all families and society could largely benefit.

Recommended book:

Willi Maurer – “Imprinting” . Ready in Italian, French and German – wimaurer@smile.ch

THE WOUND MEDICINE IS NOT ABLE TO HEAL

In some hospitals and maternity clinics, the newly born baby is, as a rule, immediately carried away from the delivery room – to give the mother a rest – so they say. This drastic separation from the mother, which can last for hours, without even having shown to her the fruit of the long pregnancy during which she was longing for the moment to hold her baby in her arms, leaves in the soul of the mother a deep wound which might have later negative consequences. But, how can a woman, who has conceived and grown in herself that baby, have a rest far from it, if she has not even had the opportunity to see it, to know it, to accept it, to touch it ?!

It is just as if the woman, getting near to delivery, has come to the clinic for giving the doctors the opportunity to exercise their function, and not the contrary. In fact, any woman, immediately after delivery, needs respect and protection, for establishing immediately the bonding mother/baby. (The female mammalian, in that moment, isolates herself from the group, for being undisturbed near their puppies, for knowing them and for establishing with them that bonding which will keep them for a long time always near her.

During delivery, the emotions are so strong and don't allow to reflect on what is really happening, so that, the woman finally finds herself alone, empty, without the possibility to have a physical contact with the creature she has just delivered.

Birth, which belonged once to the sphere of women, in which women assisted women, passed in the hands of the medical world. This has meant, during the last century : to convey women towards maternity clinics where to give birth to their children.

It must be underlined that this change has offered many positive aspects, as for instance, the high reduction of women and child mortality, as well as the possibility to heal many illnesses and solve problems through medical care or thanks to surgery, possibilities not existing in the past. Nevertheless, this has brought the loss of all those values which give significance to the arrival of a new being and which should make of the birth of a child a sacred event.

Women and babies are unfortunately often treated as impersonal patients, and the applied procedures don't take into consideration the high emotive and intimate value of the birth event. An experience highly important for the cohesion of the family is depreciated in favour of security. The experience of careful midwives and of sensitive medicines, as Michel Odent, give of it an ample demonstration.

Very often, the wound the woman undergoes after the birth of her baby awakens in herself some wounds of the past, hidden in her unconscious or in some inmost corners of her heart. These heavy wounds can create a strong depression, and the depressed woman has difficulty in feeling love for her baby and for the people who would like to help her. Or, she feels love, but a love coloured with pain

It is a heavy wound because the inborn ability of mothers to nurture and to cultivate a connection with her baby is damaged. It is a wound because, instead to feel joy for the birth of the new life, the woman feels only sadness. There might be also some physical pain, but there is above all that deep pain, that emotional suffering of the

soul, due to the regret of what has not been made possible to her : the immediate contact with her baby, the intimate connection which was meant to last for ever.

Also children missing that first contact with their mother, contact which is extremely important, suffer for lack of manifestations of love. They get psychologically put out. The same is said when a mother is wounded: she is psychologically dead. Not having received the joyous aspect of the event, with great difficulty she will be a serene, satisfied and positive mother.

Only a good start in breastfeeding can be a valid mean for taking contact with her child and starting to heal her wound.

One should not forget that lack of love can generate aggressiveness and violence.

Finally, as each child, at birth, needs to stay in contact with its mother, so each mother, after delivery, needs to stay with her baby.

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Advised text: "Songs from the womb" – Healing the wounded mother.
Author: Benig Mauger – Editor: The Collins Press - Dublin

BREAST FEEDING

Breast feeding by the mother is a function that exalts completely all the female values. The subsequent consequences benefit not only mother and child in the first person, but also at the same time the whole of society.

Breast feeding offers a wonderful opportunity for mother and child to learn how to get to know each other right from the first moments of birth.

The production of maternal milk and feeding represent a natural progression from pregnancy and birth. In fact, lactation is a healthy moment in the reproductive sequence, a sequence that includes pregnancy, birth and breast feeding.

Mothers who breast feed find that it gives them an intimate feeling of fulfilment.

The mother's milk is the most natural and safest food for a baby and breast feeding is for many mothers the completion of their female nature.

Pregnancy, the birth of the child and breast feeding, characterise a particular phase in the life of a woman, a phase that brings with it a series of extraordinary emotions.

For the breast feeding to be successful, the only rule to be adopted is that there should be no rigid rules. The factor that will determine the frequency and duration of feeds is the baby's hunger. In fact, babies have a considerable capacity for self-regulation.

Breast feeding is good for the baby, but also for the mother. In fact, it reduces osteoporosis, the risk of ovarian tumours, helps lose the excess weight gained during pregnancy and consolidates the relationship with the baby that had already started in the first moments of the pregnancy, and maybe, in some fortunate cases, even before conception. Above all, it is good for the baby. In breast fed children respiratory infections are three times less frequent than in bottle fed babies; gastrointestinal infections are also less frequent, as are allergies and the risk of cot deaths. One also should not overlook the monthly saving, that is a considerable sum.

When breast feeding is performed with love, the milk, loaded with emotions, transmits to the baby those extraordinary etherical particles that make the feeding become a complete energising process. In fact, the milk feeds the body of the baby, but also his psyche, producing in him the need for a relationship with his mother.

From the psychological point of view, the physical point of contact between mother and child strengthens the relationship between the two, which makes it possible for the mother to satisfy her desire to love and care for her little baby, while at the same time meeting its need for contact with its mother.

The newborn baby has only three needs: the warmth of its mother's arms, the milk from her breasts and the secure knowledge of the mother's presence, needs which breast feeding satisfies completely.

THE POSTPARTUM

Even if pregnancy and childbirth are not to be considered illnesses, nonetheless, they absorb a significant amount of physical and psychic energy from the woman. The period immediately after the birth, known as the postpartum, is necessary for allowing her the much needed tranquillity for a complete recovery.

Today it has become common to have the mother get up just a few hours after the birth. This system has proved valid, and neither does the secretion of milk seem impaired. This does not, however, mean that the mother should be deprived the possibility of sleeping and resting, especially after each feed.

Movement, suitable exercises and massages will favour the involution of the uterus and the toning of the muscles of the abdomen. It has been demonstrated that also breast feeding aids the involution of the uterus.

During the postpartum, after the birth, in the place where the placenta was, there is a wound that must heal. The self-regenerating forces of women, if assisted by appropriate care and an adequate diet, will complete their task successfully, but maximum hygiene and obstetric help are necessary.

The postpartum is a period during which a cold, a banal influenza, bronchitis or a throat infection are enough to threaten the health of the woman.

The new mother will have to measure her temperature twice a day: morning and afternoon. It must not go over 37.5°. If it should go over it will be necessary to consult a doctor. Fortunately, fevers in new mothers have become very rare.

The period after giving birth is a very particular phase in the life of a woman. Generally, after the birth, a feeling of prostration begins, which generates a light form of depression called 'postpartum depression', during which women are very prone to cry. Finding herself having to face many unusual situations which she does not feel up to handling, the woman lets herself go into a period of melancholy, which, though, last a short time. In this period, it will be the people that surround her that will have to give her assistance and loving support.

DEPRESSION

For too long not enough attention has been paid to the state of depression that strikes women after the birth of their child, a state that can manifest itself in various ways:

- Crisis of the new mother
- Postpartum depression
- Psychosis of the new mother

The *'crisis of the new mother'* is a light form that may start a few days after the birth and last for up to about two weeks. During this period the woman feels sad, tired and prone to tears. These are symptoms that last a short time and are due to the change in hormones and the emotions caused by the recent birth.

The *'postpartum depression'* strikes many women and is an illness that often goes unrecognised, underestimated, neglected, unexpected and often ignored by members of the family and even by the medical operators themselves.

This type of depression can start immediately after the birth, but most women start to manifest the symptoms from the sixth week after the birth onwards.

Many women are hesitant about expressing their malaise or do it after some time, even if they are feeling strange, but without knowing what to do and to whom to speak to.

Still today, women experiencing such symptoms are not taken seriously and feel embarrassed and terribly guilty: they should be feeling happy, but they don't. Very rarely these women tell their obstetrician, gynaecologist or paediatrician about the state of malaise they find themselves in.

When the birth has gone in the best possible manner, when the event is surrounded by joy and mother and child are well, entering a state of depression seems out of place. Generally, when strange sensations, sad thoughts and strong emotions manifest themselves, those assisting define the state simply as 'stress'.

This is what one woman wrote after successfully getting over this uneasy period:

"After the birth of my child I understood that something inside me wasn't right. I felt detached from everything and I had strange and bizarre thoughts and physical symptoms, such as: cold, tremors, lack of sensitivity, symptoms that increased when I was at home alone. I cried frequently, especially when people spoke to me. I had no appetite and couldn't sleep. I suffered panic attacks and was terrified by my state of anxiety, I felt I was out of control and feared that I might go mad."

Sometimes, depression does not manifest itself clearly, disguising itself as something else. Women declare that they feel tired, irritated, sad and tearful. Everything they do requires a great effort and they have no energy and no motivation. They do not feel they can cope with the new demands. A very common symptom is anxiety. They are particularly anxious about the baby, its health and its behaviour. They feel confused, because they feel no affection for the child. Sometimes they even experience anger, continuing to go round in the vicious circle of self-blame. Their thoughts can run to throwing the baby out of the window or hurling it onto the bed... Even if they don't do it, they have had the thought; however, it is important that they are able to talk to someone and also that they know that many other women have had the same thoughts and experiences. They have nightmares and hallucinations. They often say: "I think I'm going mad".

When women are very anxious and without help, there can be cases of ill treatment of the baby, unintentional, but as a reaction to their inability to solve problems and better the situation.

Speaking to the partners, many men confess to feeling scared and confused; they are worn out and they feel impotent, they don't know what to do and they don't feel capable of resolving or improving the situation. They are not used to seeing their partner looking so embarrassed. Sometimes they are terrified that the state of depression may last forever. Men also need help and to

understand what are the causes of their partner's symptoms and to know that with suitable psychological support the situation can be righted.

The birth of a child brings with it enormous changes that can be experienced as a loss, changes in personal identity, roles, physique, changes in lifestyle and development. These changes are not taken into consideration or even communicated, because in this moment the general expectations are of happiness, joy and admiration of the child, while the real experience may be very different and full of conflict.

If a mother talks about the difficulties she is living, she will be considered a 'bad mother', thus anything said on the subject will only produce further problems.

Depressed women need to:

- be listened to and to be able to express themselves freely;
- realise what is happening to them;
- not feel alone, so as to be able to share these common sensations with other women;
- be able to ask for help;
- not lose their self-esteem if some aspects have not been realised, particularly during childbirth.

These things can already help a lot, and changes can be seen from one meeting to the next, even only one week apart.

Then there is the '*psychosis of the new mother*'. This is a very rare and serious psychopathic illness. In fact, it strikes one or two women in every thousand. Treatment must be immediate, with the use of drugs, hospitalisation and twenty-four hour surveillance.

Also fathers can experience the change that has come about in their lives as the result of the arrival of a child as a loss of liberty, of free time, at work and at rest. For the father, the arrival of a child can bring out unresolved conflicts and problems pertaining to the past, to his relationship with his family of origin, to the role of parent. It is only talking about it, allowing the 'ghost' to emerge, that it is possible to spark off the creative process of having a child.

For the couple there is the loss of their intimate and undisturbed relationship. Rhythms change, just as sleep habits change, sex, going out, house management, life style, friends... Role changes bring with them conflict and resentment.

Expectations and values regarding the growing up of the child can be very different within the couple, generating further stress.

Therefore, courses that prepare you for childbirth play an essential role, because they can bring out these issues and debate them. An interesting study has been carried out in England: one group of women were given full information about all the life changes that take place when a baby is born, the possible difficulties, sensations and how to find practical solutions. Another group was left without the above information. The first group registered a markedly lower number of cases of depression. It is therefore legitimate to think that prenatal courses are of great importance in as much as they play an educational and preventive role.

The courses are important also for identifying problems that may be emerging already during pregnancy; in fact, 30% of women who suffer from depression do so already during pregnancy.

Therefore: it will be a good idea to observe physical symptoms right from the fifth month and understand whether the woman is nurturing negative sensations towards her baby, if she sees him as a parasite or something else.

A further helping factor can be the quality of the interaction and the understanding within the couple and their desire to have a child, a desire matured in the couple well before conception.

KANGAROO-THERAPY

Kangaroo-therapy is spreading continuously and has become common practice in many countries around the world.

This 'kangaroo mother' method of assisting a preterm baby is the effective proposal adopted in 1979 by two researchers at the Mother and Child Institute in Bogotá (Colombia). A proposal that has spread and consolidated itself with experiences of high scientific value at an international level, aiming at improving the quality of life, attributing value to the mother-child relationship as the fundamental element for overcoming the difficulties of development.

Kangaroo-therapy rests on three basic principles: love, the mother's warmth and breast feeding, which replace the gloves, white overalls and probes of many neonatal wards.

The warmth of the mother, which ensures the survival of the baby that does not yet have sufficient organs to adapt to the temperature of the environment, is generated and transmitted by the mother's body. The baby is bandaged to his mother's breast, with skin to skin contact, and in a vertical position, to avoid reflux and bronchial aspiration. Naturally, it is not only a case of transmitting body heat, but also of fluids that the baby has not received due to the early interruption of the pregnancy.

The baby remains under his mother's garments and with only his face free for all the time necessary for the completion of his development. In this phase, the mother can detach herself from the child for brief periods entrusting him to others (the father, grandmother or brother...) so that they can guarantee the same transmission of body heat.

Love is essential for the development of the baby and the mother/baby relationship; in this manner, not only is the relationship not interrupted, but, on the contrary, the elements of communication and reciprocal recognition are strengthened, and they are at the base of the development of the personality of the child.

This is how a baby can make contact with the surrounding environment, from where he continues to be stimulated by sounds, smells, touch and sight. Caresses, voices, gentle rocking and the very heartbeat of the mother are important factors in the stimulation of the child's breathing, frequently subjected to apnoea.

Breast feeding is fundamental not only for feeding the baby, but also and above all for the immunological action that protects it from infections. The presence in the maternal milk of calcium, lipids, sugars, etc., seems to gradually adapt itself to the needs of the baby at every specific moment, as if there were a mechanism of constant feedback between the two organisms. At the same time, the mother/child relationship develops and strengthens.

When a preterm baby is born, depending on its condition it either remains in the intensive care unit or it is returned to the ward, where it can be looked after by the mother. The mother is involved from the start in caring for the baby. Whatever the conditions of the baby may be, it is handed to the mother so that she can breast feed it and stroke it, even when it is in the intensive care unit. As soon as conditions permit it, the baby is released from hospital and entrusted to the mother, regardless of the weight it has reached, to start the 'Kangaroo-therapy'.

Naturally, once released from hospital, the baby will be followed in the day surgery at a frequency that will vary in time.

Given the positive results obtained and the simplicity of the application, as well as the low cost, the 'Kangaroo-therapy' programme has now been adopted in all maternity clinics.

'Wearing' your baby

Once a system reserved for indigenous populations, now we have discovered the utility and advantages of 'wearing' one's baby, on one's stomach, back or side, right from the first days of life and for up to a year or more. The babies are thus kept warm and safe, allowing the mother to have her hands free for working, cooking and... stroking.

Courses on how to use them are held where the products for caring babies in this manner are sold.

The advantages are: above all, an increased physical contact that – the experts assure us – relaxes the children more and allows one to immediately understand their mood and their necessities.

‘Wearing’ babies is such an ancient practice that it is difficult to establish its origins. Images of babies ‘tied’ to their mothers can be found in ancient Greece, in ancient Japan and in Aztec paintings. But it is not only a question of history: children strapped to an adult sleep better and longer than others and transmit a sensation of security that also affects the parents.

MASSAGING THE BABY

Immediately after birth, the baby should be rested on its mother's stomach. This first, all important, skin to skin contact finds in silence its full capacity for communicating. The mother's hands, used to a tactile language, know how to find the right rhythm for calming, reassuring and expressing love.

The child should not be touched by extraneous hands; the parents should be the first to touch him, as they are the only ones capable of 'understanding' the baby who, just born, needs them to help him not feel alone and abandoned. From these first moments onwards the contact will become progressively deeper and non verbal language will unite all three for many months.

In India, and not only, massaging babies is a very ancient tradition that is practised daily by all mothers for their children, until they are about two years old.

A daily bath and massage help children grow up strong and healthy, helping even preterm babies to develop faster than other non-massaged babies. Massage also helps the baby eat and sleep better and alleviates the colic that is typical of the first months of life.

Furthermore, the physical contact strengthens the bond between the parents and the child, making it possible to develop a relationship based on a language that the baby understands, a language that comforts, reassures and nourishes its body and soul.

When to start? No proper massage should be performed before the baby is one month old. In the first months, it is a question of 'touching', brushing the baby, rather than performing a true massage. It is sufficient for our hands to follow the contours of the body and that the body feel contact with the hands of the mother. At the start, the hands must be light, or better: caressing. Then, a little at a time, you will let the energy flow, without, though, applying force.

There is an energy passing through you, and it is this energy that will guide you, but only if you are aware and lovingly involved. In that moment, you are, in a certain way, an instrument. The more relaxed you are, the more this energy will flow through to the baby.

How long should a massage last? While the baby is just a few days old, we are talking about just caressing, brushing, that should last only a few minutes.

Day by day, the duration will increase, the technique will become more precise and you will become more expert. And when the baby will be about one month old, the massage will last up to twenty or thirty minutes.

The massage must be performed very slowly, and it will be as a result of this slow pace that you will realise you have become truly expert.

The treatment should continue for at least the first four months. Once the baby is able to turn over and fully stretch its back and spinal column, you may stop. In reality, for the good of the baby, nothing is stopping you from continuing.

In any case, the mother and father massaging the baby ensure the physical and emotive completeness necessary for a harmonious development, as well as a solid bond, the benefits of which manifest themselves also in the later phases of the child's growth.

It is a good idea to refer to an expert to learn more about massage techniques.

"...Touching: that is where, very simply, everything started... In the young child, the skin comes before everything else. It is the first of the five senses. It is the skin that knows... Ah, yes, this skin, we must take care of it, nourish it with love, not with creams. Being cradled, stroked, embraced or massaged are the food that is as indispensable for the small baby as vitamins, mineral salts and proteins, if not more. If it is deprived of all these things and of odour, warmth and the voice of the mother, a voice it knows well, the baby, even if it is full of milk, will let itself die of hunger." (Extract from 'Shantala' – The Traditional Art of Indian Baby Massage by Frederick Leboyer).

WEANING

The introduction of solid foods represents the start of a **new phase of baby/mother/environment interaction**, and of a dietary education project that will have effects and repercussions even much later on in life. It is not always an easy period, but neither is it necessarily as dramatic as weaning could be when seen as a more or less rapid interruption of breast feeding.

International literature is moving more and more in the direction of eliminating the term 'weaning' and all that it evokes. In effect, we have come to realise that both biology and psychology develop slowly and it is well, whenever we can, to let the period of breast feeding, as an integration to solid foods, last as long as possible. Calmly and gradually introducing new foods and continuing the offer of the mother's milk, the baby will have time to get used to the new foods and their digestion without any sudden changes. The parents will have to be patient and sensitive, to regulate gradually the presentation of new foods.

The baby explores the specific characteristics of the new foods with its lips, teeth, nose, palate (taste, consistence, smell, heat), it discovers them with its eyes (shape and colour) and by touch; each food item strikes and provokes knowledge that remains fixed in the memory.

It is important to give these experiences time, not to limit or mortify the sensory vivacity of the baby in this special period. Food is full of symbols and meanings, but at the same time it is being identified above all as a response to the regular and continually varying need to satisfy the baby's hunger.

If the introduction of solid food into the diet is gradual and above all **not in conflict with breast feeding**, in the sense that it does not replace it, making it disappear, the baby will live this new phase with greater tranquillity. Its organism will get used to receiving these solid nutrients, while his mother's milk will become more and more just integration. Studies on this subject have demonstrated that the maternal milk changes also when it is alongside new food, continuing that process of adaptation to the baby's needs already started earlier.

There are no fixed rules for establishing when one must stop breast feeding. The ideal situation would be that the request for its mother's milk should cease spontaneously, and, consequently, at different times for different babies, according to their differing needs; case studies run easily from about eight months to two years and beyond. It seems that only then does the child no longer need the substances that it seeks in its mother's milk, useful – it is thought – for the development of some part or function of its organism, particularly for the maturing of its central nervous system.

The child that has not lived well and completed the period of breast feeding – because he was weaned too soon or because he experienced the eventual unease of a mother who was not positively involved in the role – is more likely to face this passage with less security.

It is evident that the baby, growing up, will demonstrate that he is ready for new experiences. Proceeding tentatively is inevitable, as every baby has its own individuality, as well as an assortment of needs that must be understood and accepted. We must have faith in the child and allow it to taste, discover and experiment. It is therefore necessary to pay great attention to its refusals and preferences.

Today, many women breast feed with relative ease, and for this to happen the feeding must be anticipated, not mixed and on demand. Also, the umbilical cord must not be cut too soon, otherwise the baby, suffering acidosis, will have a reduced suction capacity, and it will be weak and unable to suckle. If, on the other hand, the umbilical cord is not cut too soon, the placenta has the ability to correct the initial acidosis. This means that the placenta has not completed its task, but that it continues to send substances that correct the baby's acidity. In this manner the immediate sucking of the mother's colostrums becomes easier, which is important for the infant, which, in the hours after birth, must not lose the strength to suckle, that it would have difficulty recovering later. (Lorenzo Braibanti)

We have now come to the conclusion that breast feeding ends when the baby itself decides. There are babies who at eight months no longer want to be attached to the breast, others that instead continue far longer. The baby is its own paediatrician and knows its own physiology well. It knows it instinctively. We now know that if the baby prolongs the demand for its mother's milk, then it means it still needs it. And it needs it to complete the development of the nerve covering of phospholipids of the hypothalamus. It is therefore thought that if the child continues to ask for maternal milk even after it is one year old, it is precisely to reach the full maturity of its central nervous system. (Lorenzo Braibanti)

The above demonstrates the precision with which Mother Nature has taken care of everything for the good of the new beings coming into the world. Breast feeding is good for the baby, but also for the mother. In fact, it reduces osteoporosis, the risk of ovarian tumours, helps lose the excess weight gained during pregnancy and consolidates the relationship with the baby that had already started in the first moments of the pregnancy, and maybe, in some fortunate cases, even before conception. Above all, it is good for the baby. In breast fed children respiratory infections are three times less frequent than in bottle fed babies; gastrointestinal infections are also less frequent, as are allergies and the risk of cot deaths. One also should not overlook the monthly saving, that is a considerable sum.

Anyway, an evening breast feed, before going to sleep, should not be a great problem for the mother, while it is hugely beneficial for the baby.

Have you never seen a mother breast feeding her baby? It is a very tender spectacle. It is not possible to remain unmoved by it!