



Pregnancy and Childbirth

When you become pregnant, whether with your first child or a subsequent one, life changes. You are called upon to meet the emotional, spiritual, and physical needs of a new life. Both of you, mother and father-to-be, want to feel prepared for this challenge.

Don't wait until after the birth to care for this child. Parenting really begins as soon as you conceive. Luckily, childbirth doesn't take place 24 hours or even a week after conception. Who'd be ready?

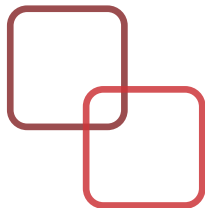
As fortune has it, we get nine months to make adjustments, preparations, and decisions and create visions for our larger family. These nine months are the "grace period" before we become parents. You get time to prepare for this new life.

Actual "birth preparation" doesn't usually happen throughout pregnancy because the inspiration to do so doesn't naturally exist. In early pregnancy, the birth seems quite far away. But, sometime around 24 weeks, as the belly gets bigger, the mind and body turn toward this one huge event. The birth begins to look like the day of reckoning. Boy, is that accurate.

After 24 weeks, the speed of pregnancy suddenly picks up and goes by very quickly. There is a direct correlation between the bigger belly and greater motivation to plan for the birth. This is Nature's way of getting you ready to both give birth and become a parent. This means that, from about the 24th week, you have a window of opportunity to prepare specifically for birth.

Childbirth: One of Life's Gigantic Gateways

For all pregnant families, "the birth" literally and symbolically represents a "gateway" through which we all must pass. Because all of us humans have been



born, even though not all of us give birth, this Gateway embraces and includes the mother, father, and extended family. The arrival of a child is never an insignificant event. The arrival of a child is always life-changing.

Through this Gateway, two must physically pass: the mother and the child. For the father-to-be, the Gateway is more symbolic: a man becomes a father.

In order to get ready to pass through this Gateway, both of you parents have to adjust to your new reality.

For a woman:

- The first few months of pregnancy are spent adjusting to the actuality of another life growing within your body. However, until your baby's movements are felt sometime around 20 weeks, this other life can seem very distant. Mostly, you just feel the changes in your body.
- The middle months are often filled with the joy and excitement of pregnancy and having a baby. This period begins after any early pregnancy sickness passes and continues until your body feels unwieldy and awkward.
- In the last months, your baby, body, mind, and in fact your entire life all begin to focus on THE BIRTH.

For a man:

- The first few months are spent adjusting to the reality of your partner's pregnancy, dealing with all her physical changes and mood swings, and trying to place the surety of having a child into your own psyche.
- The middle few months can be filled with great joy and pride. You can see your wife's belly finally getting bigger. After 20 weeks, the movement of the baby begins to be felt, and each week after that your baby becomes bigger and more obvious. Many of the rapid emotional and physical changes have settled down, and your woman begins to have that "pregnancy glow."
- During the last few months, your mind and emotions also begin to increasingly