

The Beautiful Birth Centre Newsletter



A natural choice for you and your baby



In this issue

Birthing Pool
Blessing
Tips for
breastfeeding
start-up
Welcome new
babies

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Issue 2

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Greetings!

Here you will find NEWS and VIEWS;

- some of it will be facts and stats and references or links to research will be shown
- some of it will be opinion, based on anecdotes and life experience

The Beautiful Birth Centre exists to support Natural Birth in all it's glory, so to read more, to join the debate, and to get information, subscribe by adding your email address to the list.

Pregnancy Dating

Technology has vastly improved many areas of maternity care, not least in that for the first time in our history, women do not have to fear death in childbirth. The removal of that particular shadow is no small thing, and for those of us who live within the circle of technological privilege it is something to celebrate.

But are we in danger of throwing the baby out with the bathwater? In other words, technology, in the form of medical intervention in childbirth and pregnancy has undoubtedly saved many lives. However, the emphasis on technology seems to have eclipsed many other elements that used to surround the events of pregnancy and childbirth. Mysterious and unscientific elements such as spirituality, wonderment and trust that were expressed by women as intuition or dreams.

Take pregnancy dating

This is one of those aspects which today seems to require an awful lot of science. Yet the need to measure so precisely is a very recent concern. Ovulation occurs 14 days before the first day of the period. The egg must be fertilised within 12-24 hours but sex may have taken place before the egg was released because sperm can survive for up to four or even five days. Some women are so in tune with their bodies they know with certainty the day they conceived. This certainty is rarely acknowledged by

the scientifically trained professions, who prefer to date pregnancies using combined calculations of the last menstrual period and careful measurements of images of the baby's thigh bone and skull during ultrasound scanning.

The accuracy of ultrasound scanning for dating decreases if done later than 20 weeks. The dating method using an obstetric wheel, and Naegele's Rule* is open to miscalculation on many fronts. Naegele's Rule works by assuming every menstrual cycle has a similar length and that each cycle is identical. It predicts that pregnancy will last for 280 days. The shortcomings in this rule will be immediately apparent to women who know that their cycle doesn't follow the 28 day pattern with military precision. If a woman has just come off a hormone based contraceptive or is still breast feeding then her cycle is likely to be irregular and the calculation may be wrong.

Incorrect calculations may result in an earlier estimated date of delivery (EDD) which will give the impression that the pregnancy has become over long and this often results in unnecessary interventions.

As women we are aware of subtle changes in our bodies during the menstrual cycle and likewise we have some awareness of the changes of pregnancy. Not very long ago and for most of the world today, noticing these changes are the way of dating a pregnancy. It is the mother who describes her body and recognises differences, while her caregivers respect her observations.

The most obvious early changes are:

- Lack of a period
- Breast tenderness
- Changes in food likes/dislikes and perception of taste
- Tiredness
- After 10-12 weeks the body begins to change shape and clothes may begin to feel uncomfortable
- Need to pee increases
- Quickening* (at 20 weeks for first time and 16-20 for subsequent pregnancies).

Quickening* This lovely word describes the feeling, like butterflies in the tummy, when a woman first feels her baby move within her body. It is an ancient word meaning to bring life and has nothing to do with the way your life speeds up the moment the baby is born.

It marks the beginning of the mysterious and spiritual communication of a woman and her unborn baby.

It is symptomatic of how society is changing its attitude to pregnancy and childbirth, that the event of quickening is not marked by health professionals, and although it remains a delightful and private moment for the mother, she may not be aware that there is a name for the feeling. Indeed there is a wealth of references in literature to describe the moment the unborn baby first makes his or her presence known.

French Obstetrician Michel Odent, who has brought some interesting thoughts and practices into the mainstream, most notably waterbirth, talks about industrialised childbirth where interventions are routine and outcomes are expected to conform to a standard. He questions the long term benefit to civilisation of this practice, when respect for a mother's knowledge of her body is ignored and when synthetic hormones are introduced to speed up labour.

Instead of Naegele's rule, try Wood's method

Carol Wood, Midwifery Professor at Yale University came up with a method to calculate the due date that takes into account individual variations in the menstrual cycle as well as the effect of having had a previous pregnancy.

add 1 year to the first day of the last menstrual period, then for first time mother, subtract 2 months and 2 weeks
for subsequent pregnancies subtract 2 months and 2 and a half weeks, (18 days)
add or subtract the number of days her cycle varies from 28 days

With 28day cycle	1st time mothers	$LMP+12\text{months}-2\text{months}, 14\text{days}=\text{EDD}$
With 28day cycle	Subsequent pregnancies	$LMP+12\text{ months}-2\text{months}, 18\text{days}=\text{EDD}$
Longer than 28 days		$\text{EDD}+ (\text{actual length of cycle}-28\text{days})$
Shorter than 28		$\text{EDD}- (28\text{days}-\text{actual length of cycle})$

In addition, the conventionally held view that pregnancy lasts on average 280 days has been re-evaluated with a new definition suggested 283 days, ranging from 259 days (37 weeks) to 296 days (42 weeks and 2 days) as normal. Within this range are variations that are influenced by factors such as first or subsequent pregnancy, social economic status, ethnicity and body mass index.

Pregnancy dating is where the clash of cultures has great impact. Modern, scientific techniques do not give 100% accuracy, yet the consequences of the miscalculations are considerable. Inaccurate dating may be implicated in 50% of inductions, some of these resulting in unnecessary caesarean sections. On the other hand, being told that baby is due "sometime at the end of August" leaves space for intuition, mystery and surprise.

The Quickening

Underneath my layer
a flutter of wings
un fruscio d'ali
gentle knock of wind
butterflies sing
your baby knuckles
tapping on my skin.

by Edvige Giunta

Gentle Water Birthing Pools are available for hire from

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