

'I wish I'd had a book like this when my wife was pregnant!'

Ben Shephard

Pregnancy **FOR MEN**

The whole 9 months

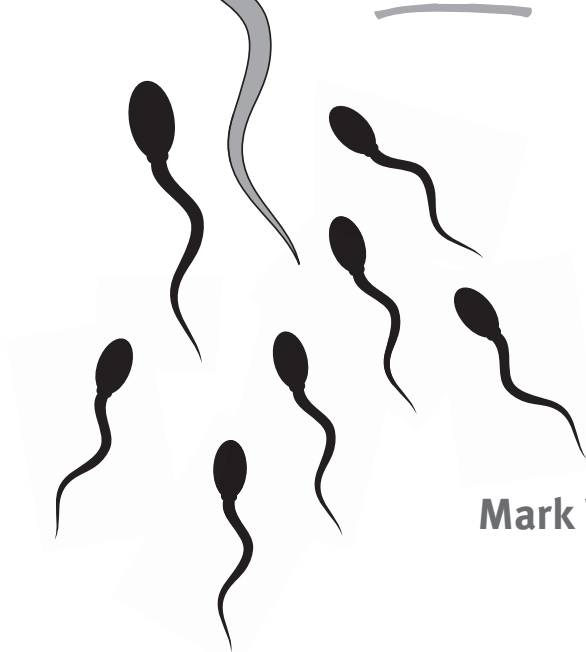


Mark Woods

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The whole 9 months



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To Sarah, Stan and the wee one on the way, with love.

About the author

Mark Woods has covered national and international stories for the UK's premier news agency, the Press Association; helped to bring a multi-million pound TV company to its knees and is now a writer and ideas man for the charity Comic Relief.

He lives in south west London with his wife and son Stanley.

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INTRODUCTION

A generation or two ago you were more likely to see a fully grown llama at a birth than the father of the child. Now more than 90% of deliveries have the dad-to-be in attendance. That's a profound change, not least for llamas who have been all but banished from the scene. With this shift has also come a gradual increase in the involvement of the father in the pregnancy itself.

In the main, this change has been welcomed and driven by modern man; as the nature of relationships have changed for the better, so has the desire of many men to be involved in arguably the most important event that a couple can share together.

Preparing for such a momentous period isn't easy. All pregnancies and indeed births, are different, but despite this, over the years some excellent books have been put together to give women the blow-by-blow information they need on carrying and delivering a baby. While these books are perfectly pitched at the mother, they often fail to take in a

vital facet of the male psyche, namely the fact that we don't really properly listen to anything, unless it's about us. It's an unattractive trait I'll admit, but then again it's got quite a few to keep it company, hasn't it?

Of course the central characters of any book on pregnancy are the main protagonists in the drama, the mother and the child. But with the increasing role of the father in the whole nine months, it's only right that they get a guide book that is written by them and for them.

This is what *Pregnancy for Men* aims to do. How? By delivering factual information in a straightforward, logical way and crucially, *crucially*, taking every single opportunity that presents itself to execute a puerile or tastefully questionable comment in order to produce the lubricant that will allow this or any kind of material to slide into a man's brain – humour.

Please don't misunderstand me, it's my sincere hope that this is a very comprehensive and useful book that will provide men with just about everything they need to know about making a baby from conception to cord cutting (and all of the information has been checked by an experienced midwife). But it's got quite a few gags in it too, that's all I'm saying.

There is a distinct possibility that this is being purchased by a woman for a man, most likely her partner. As we all know, men don't generally buy self-help books for the simple reason that we don't need any help whatsoever, unless we are trying to find something in a drawer or cupboard of course. If you happen to be a woman, rest assured that within these pages you are held in the highest regard, revered almost, for what you go through to produce a baby. You may even find the way the information is communicated here a refreshing alternative to the many, often daunting, pregnancy guides you have no doubt got stacked beside your bed at this very moment.

You are most welcome.

INTRODUCTION

I structured this book in month-by-month chapters because throughout the birth of my own son I became so confused by the week-to-week method often employed that I began to ensure I was always wearing presentable socks – so positive was I that they would be on show at some point as I once again called on the use of my toes to help me work things out.

As in life, things don't fall neatly into designated timeframes throughout pregnancy, but I've done my very best to ensure that most of what is contained within each month is roughly relevant to that part of the journey.

To avoid confusion I refer to the baby as 'he' throughout this book, for no other reason than it is one letter shorter than she and as you are soon to discover, once you have a baby saving even one 's' worth of time is worth doing.

I hope you enjoy reading *Pregnancy for Men* and find it useful too – I certainly did and can only apologise to my poor wife that I only knew about 5% of what it covers when she was pregnant. I promise that when we have our next one I'll help you out much more.

I loved researching for this book, interviewing other Dads for it and writing it.

Most of all though I love being a Dad and I'm certain you will too.

Good luck in getting there.



PROLOGUE

Making a baby

Before the bumps and the birth plan; before the midwives and the morning sickness; even before the chronic constipation and the crazy cravings – there’s making the baby. What could you possibly need to know that could make this gloriously perfect little spell in your life any better?

Well, as ever, the 21st century has managed to complicate the uncomplacatable; to add a soupçon of angst to what was once the most beautifully simple of recipes.

If you’ve negotiated it already, very, very many congratulations, you are on your way to the best, most overwhelming experience of your life. If you’re still trying your little heart out to make it happen, here’s a very quick jaunt through the ins and outs of making a baby today.

Years hoping not - days hoping so

It's entirely fitting that in a world where immediate gratification is king, we expect to conceive a child the very instant we cease doing everything within our power to stop that very occurrence from taking place.

With more than 3.5 million women in the UK taking the pill at any one time, it is the single most used form of contraception by some distance. This explains why a study by of all places the BBC's *Country File* [1] – yes that's right, John Craven talking about sex – found that so high are the levels of oestrogen flushing into the nation's rivers via sewage works, that half the male fish in lowland England are developing female characteristics. Many of the affected fish were rendered sterile or had even begun to develop eggs in their testes. At least one poor specimen was caught pulling the entire box set of *Sex and the City* behind him on a piece of weed.

Tragic.

What's even more alarming, unless you're a boy carp with boobs of course, is that the pill has also been found to change women's taste in men. Researchers have discovered that women who are taking the pill prefer looking at images of the more macho types among us, with strong jaw lines and prominent cheekbones. Women not taking the pill tended to fancy men with more feminine, softer physical features.

The above findings indicate that as women who take the pill cannot become pregnant, they are subconsciously attracted to sexy, macho geezers, rather than to men who are more likely to make a sensible long-term mate. Which is another way of saying that if your partner chose you for your rugged good looks while she was on the pill, there's a chance she might start to regret it the day after she stops taking it.

Having firmly established that oral contraception of the female kind is a potent and powerful beast, it's little wonder that the consensus

among medical professionals is that your partner should stop taking it a good month or two before you seriously try to conceive. That little cushion comes in handy for many men. We can wait a little while, oh yes, just to get our eye in as it were, but then we really do expect things to click into place pretty damn sharpish.

Of course this need for breeding speed isn't just down to rank impatience, or indeed the fragility of the male ego; there's another, more tangible and undeniable pressure that means for many of us, time is of the essence from the moment we make the joint decision to start a family: in the UK we are having our first baby later and later. Statistics show that there are now more first-time mothers in the 30–34 age group than there are in the 25–29 bracket. When you consider that according to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, at 35 women are half as fertile as when they are 25, and at 40 they are half as fertile again as when they were 35 – it's little wonder that it's taking us longer to conceive.

The pain and suffering of genuine infertility, however, is thankfully still fairly rare – the National Health Service (NHS) estimates that of 100 couples trying to conceive naturally:

- 20 will conceive within one month
- 70 will conceive within six months
- 85 will conceive within one year
- 90 will conceive within 18 months
- 95 will conceive within two years

(If, by the way, you've added up the numbers on the left and are trying to fathom out why they come to 360 rather than 100, you should perhaps be asking yourself whether children are really a wise move.)

Of course the forces behind the choice to have kids later in life is well chronicled. From financial pressure for the woman to keep working longer, or her personal desire to build a career, to the pair of you just

not being ready to face parenthood and give up the high life – more and more of us are waiting longer to swap the nights out for the nappy rash cream.

A final and little-known piece of advice if you are reading this and desperately trying to conceive.

Do you and your partner use personal lubricant? Please excuse the intrusive questioning but recent research has shown that many of the more popular brands seriously inhibit the ability of sperm to get where it needs to go. There are some special sexual lubricants on the market which claim to have overcome this problem, as it were, so it's definitely worth a bit of research before you lube up.

Words from your fellow man:

Colin, 33, father of one: *We made a conscious decision to try when we returned from our honeymoon. Took roughly nine months to get the big 'YES' from the pregnancy test. Didn't happen as quickly as we would have liked to be honest... but we got there in the end!*

David, 34, father of one: *We were 33 and 38, respectively, when we had our first and that sat just fine with me. I'd known I'd wanted children all my adult life, but had also been petrified of having bagsful of regrets when the time actually came. So I made sure in the last couple of years before Lewis arrived that we did our level best to smack the arse out of life. We went on too many holidays, drank too much wine and did too much silly stuff for a couple of our age.*

It took us an increasingly nervous five or six months until we conceived, but it was amazing when it finally happened and life-changing once our son arrived.

Chris, 34, father of one: *My wife, being of a scientific mind (she's a vet), went the clinical route right from the off. Once upon a time you knew a woman was ovulating because after four weeks of disinterest, she was suddenly dragging you to bed. Now a plastic stick tells you when the eggs are on the move. My wife would wee on said stick, it would turn some colour or other and bingo, time to copulate.*

That was one month in. As in, first go. Damn it.

The weird world of gender selection

The sex of your child has always been one of life's great lotteries. Even in this day and age when we manage to find a way to mess about with most things, the numbers still come out pretty equal. In 2004, for instance, 368,000 little boys were born in the UK compared with 348,000 girls.

There are of course a myriad of myths about how you can determine the sex of your baby. First there's only having sex on odd days of the month during a quarter moon for a boy and half moon for a girl. Given that you would need Patrick Moore in the room to work the bloody thing out, it's a method that's probably best avoided – the incessant xylophone playing would put you right off.

Then there's what a woman eats before conception. The story goes that if you want a girl, she should eat lots of magnesium-rich foods such as nuts, soy beans, and leafy green vegetables. If it's a boy you're after, a high-salt diet with plenty of red meat and fizzy beverages is best. So basically it's a healthy diet for a girl and a load of old shite for a boy. Is there any wonder that many of us have to fight off man-boobs from 35 onwards with that kind of start in life?

Surprisingly, there is one theory, one set of instructions, which at least seems to have a semblance of credibility. To understand it you need to know how a baby is made. Pay attention at the back.

Conception occurs when a sperm fertilises an egg. Eggs always carry an X chromosome while sperm can carry an X or a Y chromosome. If an X-carrying sperm fertilises an egg, a baby girl will be conceived and if a Y-carrying sperm fertilises the egg, a baby boy will be conceived. So the gender of the baby is all the man's doing. (Not that long ago many believed that one testicle made boy sperm and the other made girl sperm. Despite the pleasingly symmetrical nature of the theory, it did in time turn out to be... bollocks.)

According to this gender selection theory, boy (Y) sperm travel faster but die more quickly than female (X) sperm. In addition, an acidic environment within the vaginal region is specifically harmful for boy sperm, making conception of a girl more likely.

With these two factors in mind, in order to have a boy, insemination should take place as close as possible to the moment of ovulation so that the thoroughbred-like fast but sickly boy sperm can arrive first and steam ahead straight into the waiting egg. If it's a girl you're after, you should have sex two to three days *before* ovulation – the theory being that although the fast boy sperm get there first, they find nobody at home in the egg department and promptly die. Poor, poor boy sperm.

But don't worry, plodding along behind them like a microscopic cart horse are the girl sperm – and when they get there they have the stamina to hang around for a while in the fallopian tubes until the egg makes its arrival. So, if it's a boy you're after then having sex *as near to* ovulation as possible is key.

But it's not just the timing of the way you have sex that has an effect – it's the position you use too. Shallow penetration, with the sperm deposited close to the entrance of the vagina, favours female conception because the area is more acidic, which kills the weaker boy sperm.

To give the boy sperm a fighting chance to bypass the pool of deadly acid at the entrance, deeper penetration is needed to deposit the sperm at the least acidic area, near the uterus opening. (Interestingly, another

conception myth – having sex doggy style to conceive a boy – might not be such rubbish if this theory is to be believed.)

The theory also states that female orgasm favours male sperm because it not only reduces the acid knocking about in the vicinity, but it also makes the entire female reproductive system contract, giving the old slow coach boy sperm the kick up the arse they need to make it all the way.

Of course this theory is far from universally accepted and as with all theories there's a chance it's garbage, but at least you'll have a good time trying to find out. And if you're already pregnant, you can spend time casting your mind back to your performance on that fateful moment to try to guess what it'll be.

What's absolutely certain though is that given the misery that couples unable to conceive endure, the sex of the baby really doesn't matter a jot. What's important is that if you're successful and manage to make a new little life, not only are you a lucky, lucky man, you've also just set a chain of events in motion that will transform you, your partner and the world in which you live forever. Read on Daddy o...



MONTH 1

Is there anybody there?

You've done it. You have played a not so insubstantial part in the creation of a new life. The chances of you doing something more profound, more impactful, more 'God-like' during the entirety of the rest of your life are zero.

Making a baby is an extraordinary thing to do.

Yet everyone's at it, aren't they? Every tired face you see on the way to work in the morning, every foul-mouthed meat head at the football, every chippy teenager on the back seat of the bus – they were all conceived, carried and delivered in one way or another. In fact, every single second that ticks by sees four women give birth to a baby somewhere on the planet. It's no big deal.

And that's the pregnancy paradox you are about to enter into; this most natural of happenings, this most common of occurrences, will rock your world in spectacular fashion.

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