

Asking for a Pregnant Friend Audiobook Resources

List of 101 Questions and Related Links

Pregnancy

1. I'm really sick of everyone talking to me only about pregnancy, childbirth, and babies. How can I still have conversations about other aspects of my life and be seen as more than a pregnant woman?
2. Why do I think my partner is the most irritating person in the world? How can I start liking them again?
3. My partner and I are fighting all the time. Can the baby hear us? Are we emotionally scarring them?
4. I feel certain my partner is going to stray while I'm pregnant. They've never shown warning signs, but I'm still terrified it will happen. Should I talk to them about it? Should I just ignore the fear?
5. I don't like the idea of my partner watching naked women in birth videos. Should I ask them to not watch the videos with me?
6. I'm no longer with my baby's father and am so nervous about all the questions and judgments that will be coming my way. How should I handle it?
7. I have a friend who is devastated because she can't get pregnant. I'm afraid to tell her I'm pregnant. How should I handle this?

Sample Script for Informing a Friend You're Pregnant

"I want to start by saying how much I love you and appreciate our friendship. Before I jump into my news, I also want you to know I have no expectations about your reaction — you should feel safe to express whatever comes up. With that said, I want you to be one of the first people to know that I'm pregnant. [Pause for reaction.] I can't even begin to understand what you must be going through, but I want you to know I'm always here for you. I promise we absolutely do not have to talk about my pregnancy when we hang out. You are an amazing woman, and it's an honor to know you."

8. I used an egg (or sperm) donor to conceive and still haven't told anyone. Do I have to share this information?
9. Pregnancy has made me so irritable I can barely stand being around people. Will I always feel like this? How can I stop being so mean?
10. I can't stand my medical care provider, but I'm just weeks from my due date. What should I do?

11. I have an STD (sexually transmitted disease). I don't think it's one that impacts pregnancy, so do I have to tell my care provider?

12. I just found out my baby's sex and am so disappointed. I desperately wanted a [boy or girl] and don't feel like I can raise the opposite. These feelings are making me feel like I'm betraying my baby. How can I move past them?

Releasing Disappointment about Your Baby's Gender: yourserenelife.wordpress.com/babys-gender/

13. I'm pregnant with my rainbow baby and am so terrified I'll lose this pregnancy that I barely leave the house. What are the chances I'll have another miscarriage/stillbirth? What can I do to avoid it? And how can I calm down and enjoy my pregnancy?

Enjoying Your Rainbow Baby Pregnancy: yourserenelife.wordpress.com/rainbow-baby/

14. I break out in a cold sweat every time I pee, in fear there will be blood when I wipe. Is blood a definite sign I'm miscarrying?

EFT Video and Instructions: yourserenelife.wordpress.com/eft/

15. I think kids are irritating. Does that mean I'll be a bad mom?

16. I thought about terminating this pregnancy. I now want the baby but am filled with guilt, and I fear that my initial ambivalence means I'll be a bad mom. How do I move past this?

17. I smile and nod during my childbirth prep classes but don't really believe any of the tips will work. What should I do?

Online Childbirth Courses: <https://www.udemy.com/user/bailey-gaddis/>

Releasing Shame During Pregnancy: yourserenelife.wordpress.com/releasing-shame/

18. Are these kinky, kind of eerie sex dreams I'm having normal?

19. I'm feeling so turned on and want to masturbate all the time. But when I do, I'm consumed with shame because I'm so aware of my baby being right there. Is there a way to stop the shame? Or should I just hold off on masturbation until after childbirth?

20. How do I become more comfortable having sex while pregnant? Is the baby aware of what we're doing?

21. Could the rush of blood from an orgasm hurt my baby?

22. My vulva is so swollen you can see it through my pants. Why is it like that, and what can I do about it?

23. Why does my vagina smell weird?
24. My vagina occasionally feels like a bolt of lightning is hitting it. What's up with that? How can I make it stop?
25. My discharge is grossing me out. Why is there so much of it? Is it ever a sign of a problem?
26. I've heard so many women talk about loving their pregnant body, but I can't stand mine. I can barely look in the mirror, and I feel so unsexy. My body shame is even making me resent my baby. Is there something wrong with me?
27. Why does it look like a crimson, white-capped mountain range has sprung up on my face?
28. Why are there dark spots all over my face?
29. I've turned into Sasquatch. Why am I so hairy?
30. My boobs are so itchy I feel like sticking sandpaper in my bra. Why are they itchy, and how can I soothe them?
31. Why am I sweating so much?
32. My various body odors and breath have gotten out of control. Is that normal? What's a safe way to mask the stinks?
33. I sometimes open my mouth to talk, and a burp comes out instead. Why? And what's up with my constant constipation and uncontrollable farting? Is there a way to minimize all this gas? Or to at least feel less embarrassed when it happens?
34. I succumbed to sushi and a glass of wine. Am I the worst pregnant lady ever?
35. I'm over thirty-five, and when people refer to my pregnancy as geriatric I want to scream. How can I ask them to use a different term? And how can I shift my own beliefs around being an "old mom"?
36. I smile and nod when my care provider is talking, but I have no idea what half the terms or tests they're mentioning mean. Can I have a crash course on the words coming out of my care provider's mouth?
37. I've been craving inedible items like clay and dirt. What the heck is going on?

Birthing

38. I don't want my partner at our child's birth. Is there something wrong with me? Should I just get over this feeling? Do I even have a say in whether they're there or not?

39. What are my rights during birth? Do I have to do everything my care provider says?

40. Does anybody actually pay attention to birth preferences?

Sample Lists of Birth Preferences: yourserenelife.wordpress.com/birth-preferences/

41. What if I don't like my labor and delivery nurse? Do I just have to deal with them?

42. I know that millions of women have had babies and blah blah blah, but I keep thinking I'll be the rare lady who can't do it. How can I unlock my confidence and courage around my birthing abilities?

Low Cost Doula Resource: joyinbirthingfoundation.org/our-doula-services.html

Enhancing Your Confidence for Childbirth: yourserenelife.wordpress.com/enhancing-birth-confidence/

43. I'm a huge control freak and can't stand the thought of not knowing when I'll go into labor, what it will feel like, and how long it will take. How do I deal with all the unknowns?

Making Peace with the Unknowns of Childbirth: yourserenelife.wordpress.com/unknowns-of-childbirth/

44. Why am I so afraid I'll die during childbirth?

Releasing the Fear of Dying during Childbirth: yourserenelife.wordpress.com/fear-of-dying/

45. I'm paralyzed by the thought of birthing in a hospital. But I'm also uncomfortable with a home birth. What should I do?

Discovering the Ideal Environment for Birth: yourserenelife.wordpress.com/ideal-birth-space/

46. I've experienced sexual trauma and am terrified at the thought of giving birth vaginally. Is it horrible that I want to ask for a cesarean birth?

See "Essential Tips for the Journey" in Appendix 1 below.

47. What will happen if my baby needs serious medical attention after birth?

48. What's a cesarean birth really like?

Journey through a Gentle C-Section: yourserenelife.wordpress.com/gentle-csection/

"The Microbiome Seeding Debate — Let's Frame It around Women-Centred Care"
- <https://reproductive-health-journal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12978-019-0747-0>

49. What's C-section recovery really like?

50. Are VBACs really as dangerous as many assume? Why are they frowned upon in so many areas?

Journey through a Peaceful VBAC: yourserenelife.wordpress.com/vbac/

51. I want to have a VBAC but can't find a care provider in my area who will attend one. What should I do?

International Cesarean Awareness Network (ICAN): ican-online.org
ICAN's hotline: 0-811-686-4226

52. Is a cesarean birth the only option if my baby is breech?

Turning a Breech Baby: yourserenelife.wordpress.com/breech-baby/

Spinning Babies: spinningbabies.com/

Dr. Stu: birthinginstincts.com

53. I keep hearing that everyone ends up getting an epidural. I want an unmedicated birth, but should I just give up hope?

54. What is my care provider not telling me about Pitocin and epidurals?

55. Is there any chance an epidural could paralyze me?

Feeling Calm as an Epidural Is Placed: yourserenelife.wordpress.com/epidural-meditation/

56. I want to have an orgasmic birth. Is it possible?

Preparing for an Orgasmic Birth: yourserenelife.wordpress.com/orgasmic-birth/

[OrgasmicBirth.com](https://www.orgasmicbirth.com)

57. Is a vaginal tear as scary as it sounds?

Releasing the Fear of Tearing During Childbirth: yourserenelife.wordpress.com/fear-of-tearing/

How To Do a Perineal Tissue Massage: <https://youtu.be/V-y61g7tYfo?si=qk87HbtEj2l6AU5->

58. Will my vagina look like minced meat after a vaginal delivery?

59. Will it be weird if I want to be totally nude during labor?

60. I'm getting really focused on what I'll look like during and after labor. I'm especially concerned about looking bad in photos. Should I bother with doing my hair and makeup when labor starts?

61. I know everyone asks about pooping during birth, but let's be real; will the care providers pull a face behind my back if I poop?

62. I'm very reserved and cringe at the idea of screaming or cursing, or having strangers see my vagina, butt, and breasts during birth. Will this impede my ability to labor?

63. What's it really like to push a baby out?

Turning a Breech Baby: yourserenelife.wordpress.com/breech-baby/

How To Turn a Breech Baby: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oTIhooHOB3s>

64. Will I be judged if I want to eat my placenta? And is it worth it?

65. What if part of my placenta doesn't come out of my uterus? What will my care provider do?

Mothering

66. My friends are a huge part of my life, but none of them have kids. I'm starting to feel really isolated. What should I do?

67. My partner seems resentful of my relationship with our baby. I don't want my romantic relationship to suffer, but I also think my partner should understand how important it is for me to bond with our baby. What should I do?

68. My partner and I fight all the time about how to care for our baby. It's exhausting. What should we do?

69. My partner is showing signs they're going to leave. Should I address these concerns, or try to ignore it? Can I do this alone if they do leave?

70. I resent my baby for getting all the attention, and I feel invisible. How can I start feeling like I matter?

71. I find it really boring to take care of a baby all day. Does that make me a bad mom? Is there a way to make it more entertaining?

72. I don't feel connected to my baby. I don't even like to look at them. Am I a monster?

73. I get really defensive when I receive unsolicited parenting advice. It's so bad I've been snapping at strangers and find it hard to be around friends and family members who have kids. How can I navigate this advice without creating tension?

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74. I know there's a whole movement about not judging mothers, but I'm still afraid I'll be judged. How can I feel secure in my parenting decisions and manage the judgment when it comes?

75. I have a loved one who had a miscarriage and seems to have a hard time being around my baby. How should I navigate this relationship?

threelittlebirdsprenatal.org/

#IHadAMiscarriage - shop.drjessicazucker.com/

76. Since giving birth to my second baby, I've been finding my first child kind of irritating. Am I a bad mom for not feeling equal favor for my children?

77. My pet used to feel like my child, but now that I have a human child I never want my pet around because I'm nervous they'll hurt the baby. Should I find my pet a new home?

78. The thought of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) keeps me up at night. Why does it happen, and how can I prevent it?

Safe Sleep Guidelines: cpsc.gov/safesleep

79. I have horrific thoughts about awful things happening to my baby. Sometimes I imagine being the person inflicting harm. Am I crazy? Am I a danger to my baby?

80. Sometimes I fantasize about running away. Do I need help?

81. I had a horrible childhood and am afraid I'll replicate that with my child, as I have no good parenting role models. Am I destined to be a bad parent?

- How to Talk So Little Kids Will Listen: A Survival Guide to Life with Children Ages 3–7 by Joanna Faber and Julie King (Scribner, 2017.)
- No Bad Kids: Toddler Discipline without Shame by Janet Lansbury (CreateSpace, 2014).
- Parenting with Presence: Practices for Raising Conscious, Confident, Caring Kids by Susan Stiffelman (New World Library, 2015).
- RIE Parenting Classes: rie.org Respectful Parenting Sessions with Janet Lansbury: sites.fastspring.com/jlmlpress/product/sessions
- The Whole-Brain Child: Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind by Daniel Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson (Bantam, 2012).

82. Until my baby is vaccinated, I don't feel comfortable taking them out of the house or exposing them to anyone but my partner and me. Am I being paranoid?

childcareaware.org/families/choosing-quality-child-care/

83. Will my vagina feel the same to my partner after a vaginal birth? Will sex feel the same for me?

84. I've been avoiding sex because I now associate my vagina and breasts with my baby, and I can't reconcile motherhood with arousal. Is there a way to shift my mind and body out of mom mode so I can enjoy sex again?

85. I've been having the heaviest, most insanely painful periods since having my baby. Is this normal?

86. I feel like I should want to breastfeed, but I'm totally freaked out by the idea. Why do I feel like this? What should I do?

87. I feel self-conscious about my massive leaking boobs. How do I make them stop leaking? And how do I stop feeling ashamed of my body? Especially when I'm in public.

88. Why are my milk-producing boobs constantly changing size? Why have my nipples changed color? And what can I do to ensure they don't look defeated when I'm done breastfeeding?

89. I feel pleasurable sensations when I breastfeed, and it's messing with my head. I can't reconcile having what I can only describe as a sexual feeling while doing something that's far from sexual. It's making me resist breastfeeding. What should I do?

90. My baby bit my nipple while breastfeeding, and I yelled at them. They're now scared of me, and I'm scared of them biting me again. It's breaking my heart. How can we move through this?

91. Sometimes my breastmilk starts squirting in all directions. Is that normal? How many holes do my nipples have?

92. I'm tempted to drink my extra breastmilk. Is it safe? Is it worth it? Should I just donate it?

Milk Banks

hmbana.org

medolac.com

prolacta.com

lactalogics.com

93. Is any amount of marijuana safe to consume while breastfeeding? Is it bad that I'm craving it?

94. I elected to have a C-section, but my community of moms is super crunchy. I'm afraid I'll be judged if I talk honestly about my child's birth. Should I lie?

95. I have so many hemorrhoids I can barely sit down. Will they go away? And how do I make them stop itching?

96. I'm disappointed by my birth experience. People keep telling me I should just be happy I have a healthy baby, but I feel like a failure. How can I reconcile with my child's birth story and move past these emotions?

97. What's the deal with cosleeping (aka bed-sharing)? Is it as dangerous as many imply?

98. Sometimes, I'm so painfully tired I'm tempted to let my baby cry while I try to sleep. What should I do?

99. I don't want another baby but am met with shocked looks and judgmental questions when I share this information. Is it selfish to not want another child?

100. I really want to get back to work and am considering finding full-time childcare or asking my partner to stay home with the baby. Am I not bonding properly? How do I broach the subject with my partner?

101. I have a baby with special needs, and while I feel intense love for them, I'm devastated they won't have the life I imagined. I also resent how much my life will change. How can I work through my emotions and find acceptance for our situation?

Recommended Resources

Affordable Doula Care

- Doula Medicaid Project: healthlaw.org/doulamedicaidproject/
- List of volunteer doula programs across the United States: radicaldoula.com/becoming-a-doula/volunteer-programs/#C23
- Joy in Birthing Foundation (Los Angeles County): joyinbirthingfoundation.org
- The Doula Project (New York City): doulaproject.net
- Birth Options Alliance (Washington, D.C.): birthoptionsalliance.org/free-and-low-cost-birth-doulas-and-postpartum-doulas.html

Breech Babies

- Breech-Baby-Turn Hypnosis Recording: yourserenelife.wordpress.com/breech-baby/
- Dr. Stuart Fischbein: birthinginstincts.com Spinning Babies: spinningbabies.com

Childbirth Preparation

- Childbirth Preparation: A Complete Guide for Pregnant Women (Bailey's online course): [udemy.com/course/childbirth-preparation-a-complete-guide-for-pregnant-women/](https://www.udemy.com/course/childbirth-preparation-a-complete-guide-for-pregnant-women/)
- The Complete Guide to the Alexander Technique: [alexandertechnique.com](https://www.alexandertechnique.com)
- Birthing from Within: [birthingfromwithin.com](https://www.birthingfromwithin.com)
- HypnoBirthing: [us.hypnobirthing.com](https://www.us.hypnobirthing.com)
- Lamaze International: [lamaze.org](https://www.lamaze.org)
- The Bradley Method: [bradleybirth.com](https://www.bradleybirth.com)

Cosleeping

- Safe Cosleeping Guidelines: [cosleeping.nd.edu/safe-cosleeping-guide-lines/](https://www.cosleeping.nd.edu/safe-cosleeping-guide-lines/)

Counseling Resources

- Psychology Today: [psychologytoday.com/us](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us)

Doula Resources

- American Pregnancy Association — What Is a Doula?: [americanpregnancy.org/labor-and-birth/having-a-doula/](https://www.americanpregnancy.org/labor-and-birth/having-a-doula/)
- DONA International: [dona.org/what-is-a-doula/find-a-doula/](https://www.dona.org/what-is-a-doula/find-a-doula/) [DoulaMatch.net](https://www.DoulaMatch.net)
- Birth Doula Services: [YourSereneLife.wordpress.com/birth-doula-services/](https://www.YourSereneLife.wordpress.com/birth-doula-services/)

Guided Meditation Downloads

- Awaken the Courage to Advocate for Your Birthing Rights: [yourserenelife.wordpress.com/birthing-rights/](https://www.yourserenelife.wordpress.com/birthing-rights/)

- Discovering the Ideal Environment for Birth: yourserenelife.wordpress.com/ideal-birth-space/
- Enhancing Your Confidence for Childbirth: yourserenelife.wordpress.com/enhancing-birth-confidence/
- Enjoying Your Rainbow Baby Pregnancy: yourserenelife.wordpress.com/rainbow-baby/
- Feeling Calm as an Epidural Is Placed: yourserenelife.wordpress.com/epidural-meditation/
- Journey through a Gentle C-Section: yourserenelife.wordpress.com/gentle-csection/
- Journey through a Peaceful VBAC: yourserenelife.wordpress.com/vbac/
- Making Peace with the Unknowns of Childbirth:
yourserenelife.wordpress.com/unknowns-of-childbirth/
- Preparing for an Orgasmic Birth: yourserenelife.wordpress.com/orgasmic-birth/
- Releasing Disappointment about Your Baby's Gender:
yourserenelife.wordpress.com/babys-gender/
- Releasing Shame during Pregnancy: yourserenelife.wordpress.com/releasing-shame/
- Releasing the Fear of Dying during Childbirth: yourserenelife.wordpress.com/fear-of-dying/
- Releasing the Fear of Tearing during Childbirth: yourserenelife.wordpress.com/fear-of-tearing/
- Turning a Breech Baby: yourserenelife.wordpress.com/breech-baby/

Midwife Associations

- American College of Nurse-Midwives: [midwife.org](https://www.midwife.org)
- Midwives Alliance of North America: [mana.org](https://www.mana.org)
- National Association of Certified Professional Midwives: [nacpm.org](https://www.nacpm.org)

- North American Registry of Midwives: narm.org

Parenting Classes and Books

- How to Talk So Little Kids Will Listen: A Survival Guide to Life with Children Ages 3–7 by Joanna Faber and Julie King (Scribner, 2017.)
- No Bad Kids: Toddler Discipline without Shame by Janet Lansbury (CreateSpace, 2014).
- Parenting with Presence: Practices for Raising Conscious, Confident, Caring Kids by Susan Stiffelman (New World Library, 2015).
- RIE Parenting Classes: rie.org
- Respectful Parenting Sessions with Janet Lansbury:
sites.fastspring.com/jlmlpress/product/sessions
- The Whole-Brain Child: Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child’s Developing Mind by Daniel Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson (Bantam, 2012).

Parenting Children with Special Needs

- ARCH National Respite Network: archrespite.org
- Caregiver Action Network: caregiveraction.org
- Center for Parent Information & Resources, Find Your Parent Center:
parentcenterhub.org/find-your-center/
- Complex Child E-Magazine: complexchild.org
- Different Dream Living: differentdream.com
- Mommies of Miracles: facebook.com/MommiesofMiracles
- Nancy’s House (Mid-Atlantic region): nancys-house.org
- National Down Syndrome Society, “Welcome to Holland”: ndss.org/resources/a-parents-perspective/

- Parent to Parent: p2pusa.org

Your Rights During Childbirth

- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists' Committee Opinion on Refusal of Medically Recommended Treatment during Pregnancy: acog.org/clinical/clinical-guidance/committee-opinion/articles/2016/16/refusal-of-medically-recommended-treatment-during-pregnancy
- Childbirth Connection — Making Informed Decisions: childbirthconnection.org/maternity-care/making-informed-decisions/
- Human Rights in Childbirth: humanrightsinchildbirth.org
- Improving Birth: improvingbirth.org

SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome)

- American SIDS Institute: Sids.org
- International Society for the Study and Prevention of Perinatal and Infant Death: ispid.org/ispid/
- Pregnancy after Loss Support: pregnancyafterlosssupport.org
- sleepfoundation.org

VBAC (Vaginal Birth after Caesarian) Support

- International Cesarean Awareness Network (ICAN): ican-online.org
- ICAN's hotline: 0-811-686-4226

Videos

Gaddis, Bailey. “How to Reposition a Posterior, or Sunny Side Up, Baby.” March 7, 2019.

YouTube video, 1:5:57, youtu.be/wgN40r5i7gQ

APPENDIX 1

Essential Tips for the Journey

This section includes suggestions that support various aspects of the journey into motherhood.

Rest

To ensure you’re not constantly in the “trying to keep my head above water” mode, allow yourself to rest as often as possible. When you’re feeling depleted, scared, or overwhelmed, and you just want to curl up in your bed — do that. Let yourself escape into sleep, or a book, or whatever your instincts are telling you to do.

If you feel like to-dos pile up every time you rest, determine what can be handed off, at least for the time being. Ask your partner, family member, or friend to help out with housework, ask a colleague to temporarily take some of your workload, remind yourself that missing a workout in favor of rest is not going to derail your fitness. Give yourself permission to pause.

Move

Moving your body is one of the best ways to reduce stress and anxiety and keep your body healthy. Regular movement can also strengthen your birthing muscles, potentially making birth easier. But my favorite thing about movement is that it causes endorphins to release.

Endorphins are your body’s natural pain relievers and can be up to two hundred times more

powerful than morphine. This hormone blocks your brain's ability to receive messages of pain from the sensory nerves, improves your mood, and can be passed through the placenta to baby. The more you move, the more skilled your body becomes at producing and releasing endorphins, which could cause more of these pain relievers to help you out during birth.

If you don't currently have an exercise routine, talk with your care provider about safe options. Walking, swimming, and prenatal yoga are typically safe and effective choices.

Eat

In addition to movement, what you eat has a significant impact on how you feel during pregnancy and beyond. Your care provider can help you determine if you're lacking in certain nutrients and need to eat more of a particular type of food or take a supplement. And because heartburn is an unsavory bedfellow of pregnancy, aim for eating six small meals a day, instead of three big ones.

Following are general guidelines for what types of food, and how much, you'll want to consume each day during pregnancy. It's also important to supplement your diet with prenatal vitamins.

- Protein: 2 to 3 servings (1 serving = 1 ounces, or the size of a deck of cards)
- Green veggies: 2 servings (1 serving = 1 cup)
- Orange and yellow veggies: 3 servings (1 serving = 1/2 cup)
- Fruits and berries: 2 to 3 servings (1 serving = 1/2 cup)

- Fiber-rich foods (legumes, nuts, etc.): 2 to 3 servings (1 serving = 1/2 cup), or enough to get the recommended 25 to 35 grams of fiber per day
- Whole grains: 3 servings (1 serving = 1/2 cup or 1 slice)
- Calcium: 1,200 milligrams per day; found in dairy, poultry, beans, nuts, salmon, turnip greens, and more
- Water: about 8 to 12 eight-ounce cups daily
- Omega-3 fish oil: Daily, take a high-quality fish oil supplement that has at least 200mg of DHA (docosahexaenoic acid). Or, each week, have at least two servings of an omega-3-rich fish that has low levels of mercury, like salmon (1 serving = 3 ounces, or the size of a deck of cards).
- Pink Himalayan sea salt: To taste

Breathe

When stress, anxiety, or fear start taking over, dissolve them by focusing your attention on your breath. Envision peace, clarity, and courage flowing in with each inhalation, while fear, tension, and stress flow out with every exhalation. You emit a brightening glow with each breath, until you find yourself enveloped in healing energy. Let this energy enter every nerve and cell of your being — grounding you and filling you with a deep sense of calm.

Prepare Your Home

As you'll likely be spending a lot of time in your home once your baby arrives, you want it to feel like an oasis. One of the first steps to crafting this oasis is evicting all clutter. If you don't love it or regularly use it, donate or recycle it.

From there, fill your space with fresh air by opening windows when the weather allows, and placing air-purifying plants in your room (in a location baby can't reach when they become mobile). NASA found that the peace lily, spider plant, florist's chrysanthemum, red-edged Dracaena, and English ivy all do wonders at removing toxins from the air.

As good lighting is also crucial, let in natural light during the day and use lamps in the evening, as they create a more soothing energy than over-head lighting. Placing three lamps at three different levels is ideal.

Finally, go through each room in your home and ask yourself, "How do I feel in this space?" If the answer isn't "amazing," brainstorm how you can enhance the space. Do you need to rearrange the furniture? Invest in attractive storage solutions? Paint the walls? Get rid of some focal points you hate looking at? Investing time in this project will help ensure you feel calm and clear when stuck at home (at least most of the time).

Find a Care Provider Who Believes in Patient Autonomy

Patient autonomy refers to a person's right to make a decision about their health care without their care provider trying to control that decision. Having a care provider who believes in patient autonomy will go far in ensuring your rights are honored during birth. Your care provider can (and should) share information with you about the state of your health, and baby's, and provide options if it looks like intervention is needed. However, they'll ideally share this information with as little bias as possible, encouraging you to make the decision that feels best to you and then honoring that decision.

Practicing patient autonomy — and being urged to do so — does wonders for self-governance, helping you have a more satisfying birth experience and fostering trust in yourself to make decisions without intervention from an authority figure. And this can seriously enhance your parenting experience.

Turn Your Birth Environment into a Sanctuary

Any location you birth in can be transformed into an environment filled with a sense of safety, calm, and joy by nurturing your five senses in that space. You can do this by making a list of your five senses — sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch — and then listing ideas on how you can support each during birth. For example, you could collect a few soothing prints to hang in your birthing room, in addition to some battery-powered candles, create a playlist with your favorite sleepy-time music and guided meditations, purchase an essential oil diffuser and a few of your favorite scents, pack a bag with coconut water, honey sticks, and breath mints, and find a cozy robe to wear during birth. I also recommend creating a sign to hang on the door of your birthing room that says, “Please knock gently, and enter only when invited in.” This helps ensure you have control over who comes in and out of your space.

Maintain a Strong Voice During Birth

You can stay empowered during birth by making it clear to your care provider, during a prenatal appointment close to your due date, that much of your comfort during childbirth will depend on their ability to listen rather than pressuring you into anything. In the absence of a true emergency, they should honor your birth preferences, give you ample information about any interventions they recommend and what the alternatives are, and provide time and space for

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you to make your final decision in privacy. In addition, be super clear about not wanting to hear any fear-based language or tactics.

EFT (Emotional Freedom Technique) Instructions

This effective exercise can replace any fearful, chaotic energy running through the body with calm and clarity. I recommend using the EFT technique, also called tapping, before moving into any activity that may trigger negative emotions or physical responses.

Setup

Move through the following steps to begin experiencing emotional freedom. With practice, this technique can become a quick and easy tool to release negative emotions and physical reactions on the fly.

Pinpointing the Concern

Before you begin resetting your energy around a particular issue, you need to decide what issue you would like to work with. For example, the first time I tried EFT I chose to focus on my panic-attack-inducing fear of ultrasounds — specifically, the fear that there would be no heartbeat. (The EFT dissolved my fear.) Once you clear the energy for one issue, you can move on to others. So pick a specific issue that you'd like to start with. Because the fear of vaginal bleeding is common during pregnancy, we'll use that as our example; just insert your fear where appropriate.

Distress Assessment

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We then need to determine how much distress this issue is causing. Close your eyes and focus on your fear of vaginal bleeding. On a scale of zero to ten — one being no pain or anxiety around this issue, and ten being extreme pain or anxiety around it — decide what your current level of distress is.

Affirmation

Next, you'll tune your energy system into the issue you're working on. To do this, locate two tender spots about two or three inches below your collar-bone on each side of your chest. Rub those spots in a circular motion while saying the following affirmation three times out loud (or in your head):

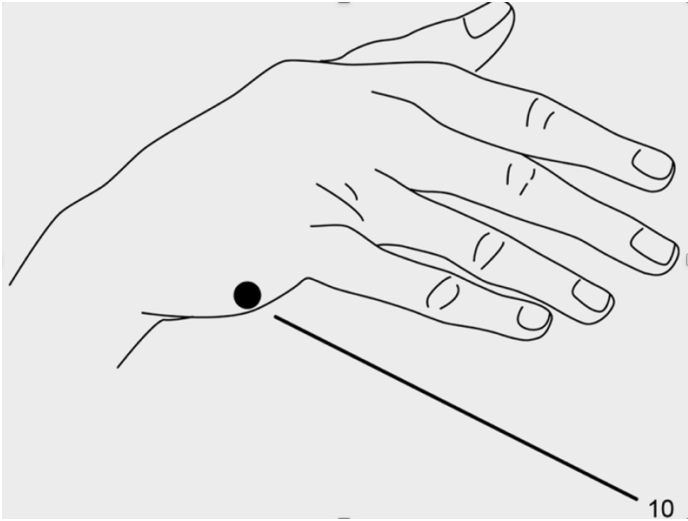
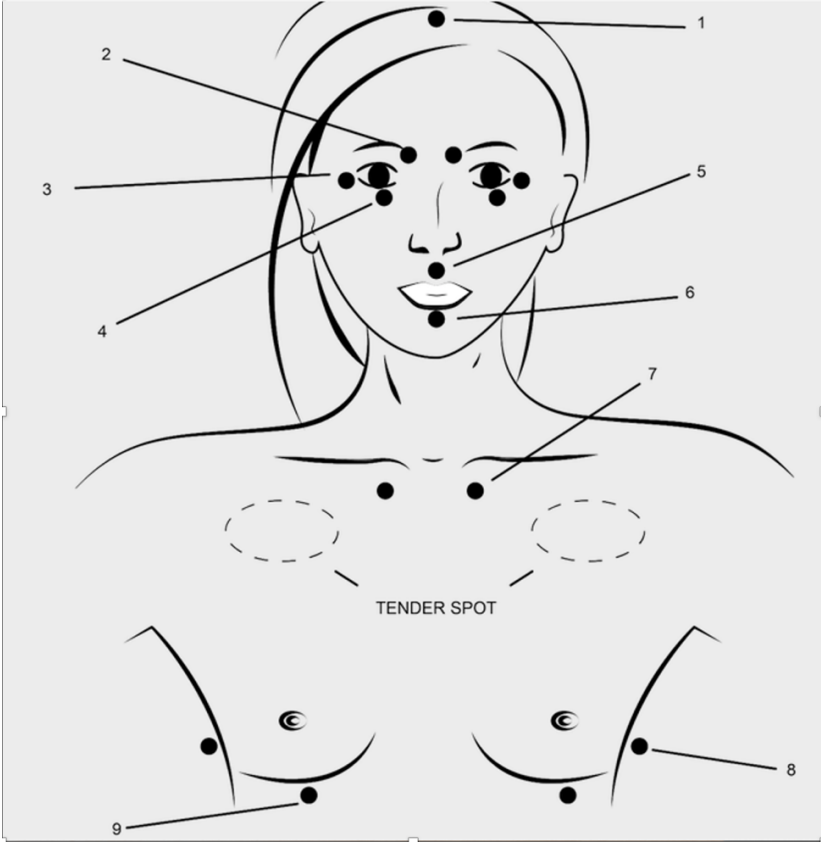
“Although I have a [insert issue here], I still profoundly and wholly love and honor myself.”

So in our example the affirmation would be, “Although I have a fear of vaginal bleeding, I still profoundly and wholly love and honor myself ” (again, said three times while rubbing your upper chest, not your boobs).

Tapping Points

Your fear (of vaginal bleeding, or childbirth, or spiders, or The Real Housewives, or fill in the blank) is now ripe for the resetting. Using the diagrams below, you're going to tap each point from one to ten, on both sides of the body, and repeat your affirmation with each number. Use your pointer and middle finger on each hand, so you can cover each side of your body with each round of counting. For a demonstration, go here: yourserenelife.wordpress.com/eft/.

Repeat the sequence a few times, then close your eyes for a moment.



Reassessment

As you sit with yourself, reassess your level of distress over the issue you're working with.

Staying with our fear-of-bleeding example, you might imagine wiping yourself and seeing blood.

See and feel yourself there, in that moment, and notice what comes up. You may still experience hints of fear or anxiety, but likely not at the same level as before you tapped.

Now, go through a few more rounds of the tapping sequence, this time using a revised affirmation. With our example, it would be something like, "Although I still have some fear of vaginal bleeding, it's subsiding, and I still profoundly and wholly love and honor myself." We're still acknowledging the fear, and now we're honoring the reduction of its intensity. Continue the cycle of tapping, affirmations, and reassessment until your intensity level is down to a zero (or whatever number you feel good with).

Fear Release Exercise

Suppressing fear-induced emotions infuses life into them, often causing a manifestation of depression or unpleasant physical symptoms. Here is a plan to liberate the emotions surrounding your fears so they can have their moment and then go bother someone else.

1. Meditate on the various elements of your life (e.g., friends, family, career, body, home, upcoming childbirth, etc.) and any fears that may be attached to them.

2. Write down the fears. If you've made it this far, tremendous progress has already been made. Fears hold the greatest power when they exist without you recognizing them.

3. Choose the fear that's causing you the greatest struggle and move through steps 1 and 2.

There's no need to move through your entire list of fears in one day; be gentle with yourself, creating time for rest in between fear release sessions.

4. Set a timer for ninety seconds. Now close your eyes, visualize the fear, and allow the emotions attached to it to be expressed. Let yourself notice and experience the emotions and any accompanying physical sensations moving through you — let go of resistance and judgment toward the fear. Hold the intention that the emotions attached to the fear will be flushed out of you by the time your alarm chimes.

(The fear you're working with may still be triggered after this exercise — that's normal, just give yourself the ninety seconds again to rerelease any attached emotions.)

5. Now that you've released the emotions attached to the fear, examine the fear objectively and decide whether it is:

Completely outside your control, and able to be fully released by doing the ninety-second-release work anytime it comes up: There is no benefit in stewing over a potential outcome you have no control over. For example, I was really nervous I'd go into labor when stuck in traffic.

As I had little control over when labor would begin, and I couldn't just stop driving, I did the fear release every time this concern popped up.

- An issue you need to educate yourself on: Knowledge gained pushes away uncertainty and invites in confidence. For example, I was so fearful of testing positive for group B strep (an
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infection caused by a common bacterium — often found in pregnancy) that I educated myself on what it actually is (not as scary as I thought), and what my options would be if I tested positive. When I did test positive, I felt calm and prepared.

- A fear you need to talk through with another person: Honest communication fosters peace, harmony, and connection. For example, if you're fearful of how your romantic relationship will shift after birth, share these concerns with your partner.

Do the work, mama. Just do it. When you release the emotions that hold up your fears, and you release the fear of them poking their heads up again (which they may do), you live from a space of love and trust, versus suffering and doubt.

Do It Daily

Every morning before you get out of bed, clear any negativity that may have made itself known as you slept by closing your eyes and envisioning any and all fears, doubts, or stressors being pulled from your mind, body, and spirit and collecting in a bubble floating in front of you. Then, deeply inhale, and as you exhale imagine the bubble being blown away from you and picked up by the wind. Imagine it being pulled so far out on the horizon it becomes a miniscule dot that pops and dissolves everything the bubble carried. Now smile, open your eyes, and claim your fresh day.

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