

The reader is taken on an intriguing path into some very particular styles of childrearing. The great achievement of this book is that through its rich ethnographic detail we are able to understand apparently “strange” practices in their own contexts, by taking into account climate, belief system, family structure, economy, religion, history, etc. We are thus invited to make the strange familiar, and in doing so, our own familiar practices are rendered just that little bit strange.

Bestfeeding: Getting Breastfeeding Right For You An Illustrated Guide

Mary Renfrew, Chloe Fisher, and Suzanne Arms
Celestial Arts Publishing Company, 1996

Reviewed by Marybeth White

Breastfeeding evokes many scenarios, from the romantized image of a newborn nuzzled against the skin, nursing contentedly by a crisp fire to the agony of cracked and bleeding nipples, and an unsatisfied babe. Frequently a woman’s perception will be shaped by the breastfeeding environment she has (or has not) been exposed to. Three women have collaborated in writing *Bestfeeding: Getting Breastfeeding Right for You*. The authors bring a vast amount of experience to their project, which includes stories from families they have worked with. Their combined knowledge spans three countries and diverse perspectives on breastfeeding.

The book is divided into sections:

- Why Women Want to Breastfeed
- How to Breastfeed
- Problems: Their Causes and Solutions.

The book explores the impact of cultural perceptions on the relative success of breastfeeding. The emphasis throughout the volume is on the nursing relationship between mother and baby. The authors convey the uniqueness of each nursing pair. They advocate the validity of a mother’s feelings and underscore the critical importance of support for each breastfeeding relationship. There is a section on special concerns such as HIV, inverted nipples, and premature babies.

Most inspiring are the case studies which give life to the physical process of breastfeeding by providing a window onto families of newborns willing to share their personal experiences. The authors have compiled an index of resources including “Where to Find Help” (an international listing), “Groups that Assist Parents of Babies with Special Needs,” “Breastpump Suppliers,” “Books You Might Find Helpful,” and an “Index of Commonly Asked

Questions.” The cross-referencing system is extremely thorough, providing quick access to the heart of a matter and guiding the reader to other appropriate sections.

The book is accurate in its information. There are a few areas, however, which require elaboration. Two such points are nipple confusion and growth spurts. Nipple confusion is experienced by an infant when he/she has been exposed to both artificial and human nipples. It is especially prevalent in the first six weeks of life. In the section “Things You Might Need to Know,” nipple confusion is mentioned briefly. There also is no information provided on growth spurts. These occur around the second week, sixth week, third month, sixth month, and every six months thereafter. Most crucial to sustained breastfeeding is the realization that a baby is in a growth spurt during the second week of life. For a period of approximately 24-48 hours, a baby will want to feed frequently. While the authors discuss the supply-and-demand mechanics of breastfeeding they do not mention the specific times when a baby is working to increase a mother’s milk supply. Frequently it is during these intervals that mothers are told, they are “running out of milk.” Many women supplement with formula at this time, which is counterproductive to increasing their milk supply.

It would have been helpful to include a list of common irritants to an infant when ingested by the mother; for example, chocolate, strawberries, cabbage, and cow’s milk. In addition, the lack of reference to licenced homeopaths and naturopaths as viable health practitioners continues to advocate the established medical community as the only voice of authority.

Overall, this book is a useful publication which sheds light on the interconnectedness between successful breastfeeding and a supportive culture. By questioning cultural norms and women’s ability to make an informed choice, the book explores the assumptions and myths prevalent in our society which jeopardize the breastfeeding relationship.

In Her Own Voice: Childbirth Stories from Mennonite Women

Katherine Martens and Heidi Harms, eds.
Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1997

Reviewed by Heather Mains

What can we learn from three generations of women recounting their birth stories? This is the question that I repeatedly asked myself as I read *In Her Own*