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FANTASY



By Jennifer Graham Kizer
Photographs by
Brian Maranan Pineda

MEETS

REALITY

Women spend pregnancy eagerly awaiting a baby: the adorable dimples, the cute outfits, the serene moments of staring into each other's eyes. And yes, there are those joys—along with some unexpected truths. Real moms who've been there and dealt with that speak up so you'll never have to say,

Why didn't anyone tell me...

...that deafening howls can come out of such a tiny creature?

"Beckett's high-pitched sobs were so painful for us, as his parents, to listen to," says Danny Kraus, of Menlo Park, California. "He seemed absolutely inconsolable. We didn't see it coming."

Kraus and his partner embarked on that time-honored, new-parent ritual: They worked their way through a checklist of possible discomforts (hungry, tired, wet, pained...) until they uncovered what their son needed. "The moment we started to bounce with him on an exercise ball, he was quiet," Kraus says. "It was magic!" Elizabeth Lombardo, of Wexford, Pennsylvania, hardly had magic in mind when she first learned about The Witching Hour—the daily period between 5 and 8 p.m. when her colicky infant cried uncontrollably. "No one warned me about this," she says. But perhaps, like many new moms, she just didn't want to believe her child had colic. "Baths, swaddling, rocking—nothing worked." Then something did: the whir of the vacuum. "My husband and I turned it on just so we could have a conversation," she says. Who knew an appliance had such powers?



...that something as natural as breastfeeding doesn't always come naturally (or painlessly)?

"All my friends and siblings breastfed their children, and as far as I knew, it was easy for them," says Kira Conley, of Waukegan, Illinois. "Well, when it came to my daughter, it was *not* easy." Although Conley was determined to master the process, baby Madalyn had her own distinct ideas. "She wouldn't latch on," says Conley. "And she would scream until we gave her a bottle."

Much later, Conley learned that she could have arranged for a lactation consultant to lend a hand, but she's made peace with baby formula. "I enjoy bottlefeeding my daughter," she says. "And it allows my husband to feed her easily, too."

Even moms who expect a learning curve encounter some major nursing surprises. "I was shocked by how much time and attention my boobs demanded after I had a baby," says Adrienne Hedger, of San Clemente, California. "The poor things were engorged, deflated, engorged again, leaking, chapped, bleeding, and spraying milk." Tali Hylan, of East Lansing, Michigan, would have appreciated prior knowledge of one key must: nipple cream. "I needed it almost the minute I returned from the hospital!" she says. "That lasted a few weeks."

...that I might not bond instantly with my baby?

Autumn Murray, of Littleton, Colorado, assumed that she would cherish every moment with her son, Ryland, who arrived following two heart-wrenching miscarriages. "But at 3 a.m., after two other late-night feedings, the only thing I cherished was my beloved pillow and blanket," she says. She even started

wishing that she had been blessed with an "easy baby," the kind with a knack for sleep.

As for those warp-speed, baby-bonding moms, Allison Taylor suspects their memories might be fuzzy. "They must've blocked out the reality of the first few months," says the Easton, Connecticut, mom, "just like you block the memory of the pain of childbirth."

...that no one mothers the mommy?

As Holly Whitmore, of Laguna Niguel, California, coped with her own bleeding (and sore nipples and sleeplessness), she made an unnerving discovery. "Once the baby is born, everyone cares about the baby—and not the parent!" she says. Loved ones repeatedly asked about her daughter Brett's milk intake, for instance—without ever asking how Whitmore was doing. "I went through quite a bit of sadness and loneliness," she says. "Because of my experience, I started a group for new moms in my area. We get together at least once a week with the babies, but we also have a monthly Moms' Night Out." You, too, may need to vent and kvetch with other new parents. To find a moms' group in your area, search for one at meetup.com, look up your local chapter of Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS), or join an online moms' group at americanbaby.com/meetmoms.

...that discomfort does not end with childbirth?

"People say that labor is the bad part," says Jen Hinton, of Mandeville, Louisiana, "but the real challenge was when I was home and sore down there!"

Taylor was caught off guard by postpartum bleeding. She cautions first-timers, "You'll have your period for up to 40 days after the baby arrives, and you'll turn the hospital bathroom into a crime scene the first time you tinkle!" Postpartum bleeding varies; it generally lasts one to four weeks.

Ariana Ferlani also missed the memo on healing. "I naively planned to attend a friend's wedding within two weeks of Jasper's birth," says the Nanuet, New York, mom, "but a tough labor left me too sore to sit comfortably for three weeks."

LOG ON!

What's your newborn-care IQ? Test your knowledge today at americanbaby.com/babycarequiz

PLEASANT SURPRISES

Not all newborn shockers are bad. Moms share some unanticipated blessings.

"You realize how easy it is to forgive someone when you love them—even if they do ruin your new suede jacket."
Elizabeth Lombardo,
Wexford, PA

"You become part of a world that only some understand. It's emotionally exciting and difficult to describe. You have to join!"
Sara Lise Raff,
New York City

"I love seeing how my husband is with our daughter, Brett—he's been wonderful, waking for every night feeding to change her diaper, taking her for walks, and reading books to her. It has brought us closer as a couple."
Holly Whitmore,
Laguna Niguel, CA

"The world seems friendlier when you're with your baby. Strangers help us carry our stroller down subway stairs, open doors for us, and pick up mittens that our baby throws."
Laura Corpus,
New York City

"My daughter began to develop a sense of humor at 9 months! One day she started to give me her pacifier, and when I reached out to grab it, she pulled her hand back while laughing. It was the first real glimpse I got of what the future would be like for us."
Allison Taylor,
Easton, CT

...about those two wicked words: "sleep" and "deprivation"?

Allison Taylor recalls that before giving birth, she "read a ton of baby-care manuals and listened to hours of advice from other parents." But the nuts-and-bolts reality of night feedings didn't register until daughter Olivia was in her arms. "In all the reading I'd done, I was shocked that nobody explained the actual breakdown of a baby's feeding schedule," she says. "Breastfeeding every two to four hours doesn't mean you'll have two to four hours of sleep in between. This was really rough to find out!" By the time you've finished nursing, burping, changing the diaper, and putting the baby back to sleep, it's possible that you'll have only one hour, or less, before the next feeding.

These nights of fragmented sleep often last for up to three months, but we're letting you know now: Some infants take longer to sleep through the night. It was five months before Catherine Calame's daughter, Charlotte, snoozed for six hours straight. "No one tells you how tired you're really going to be," says Calame, who lives in Bayport, New York. "And being tired makes everything harder." In a 2006 study of new mothers conducted by Lamaze International and Harris Interactive, exhaustion was the most common complaint—with a whopping 62 percent of women citing it as a problem.

That said, you may be pleasantly surprised at your ability to adapt to interrupted snooze time. "In the months after my daughter's birth, I learned to fall asleep for catnaps," Taylor says. "And the extreme fatigue definitely helped me become a champion at getting back to sleep quickly after a feeding."

...that outings require an exit strategy and a bag jam-packed with must-have items?

Sara Lise Raff, of New York City, found out about traveling non-lightly just two weeks after her son, Elias, was born. "We were going to a pool party," she says, "and it took us a good two hours to get ready!"

"I feel like a pack mule when I go out," Whitmore says. "Stroller, baby carrier, hat, blankets, burp cloths, two outfit changes, breast pads, a change of clothes for myself, sunscreen, toy, pacifier—I can go on and on." It's easy to forget key gear, but even when you manage to remember all the essentials, Murray says, "it's inevitable that one of you will end up with spit-up on your outfit as you're about to leave."

"Realizing I can prep certain things ahead of time made getting out the door much simpler," says Calame. "Plus, dressing and doing my hair first, then a quick feeding and a diaper change for the baby, kept us on schedule." In those early weeks, Taylor learned to consolidate trips outside the home. "Once I did get out the door, it was such a production that I wanted to accomplish everything in one outing."



...about the number of choices I'd have to make?

"So many life-changing experiences were happening all at the same time," Raff says. "The breastfeeding, the crying, the belly-button healing, the sleep deprivation, dealing with my c-section, setting limits with our parents, and making time for friends. And don't even mention the hormones!" With each new circumstance, she had decisions to make, often with friends and loved ones second-guessing her. "The first time someone told me, 'You're a good mommy,' I cried," Raff says. "I really needed to hear it."

Heather Jacksy, of Narrowsburg, New York, was flabbergasted by how complicated

baby care could be. She'd expected to disagree on occasion with her husband about, say, how to put their daughter, Kate, to bed at night. But when the family visits started, she says, "I found myself in the middle of my relatives' conflicting theories and parenting strategies." As Jacksy's confidence grew and she learned what her baby needed, she began to do things her way without worrying about others' opinions.

Without a doubt, you'll receive contradictory advice. But there are plenty of ways to take care of a baby. With some trial and error, you'll find yours. Because one of the best surprises about motherhood is this: There's no one right way to do it! 