



FAMILY
BY JOANNA & KOJI YAMAMOTO

MAKING BABY FEEL AT HOME

**Your child needs
room to roam
and explore.**

Who doesn't feel a kind of wonder upon seeing a newborn baby, and beyond that who doesn't feel a thrill of joy in picking up that baby, holding him close and recognizing he's glad to be with you? After all, it wasn't so very long before—minutes, days, or weeks—that the baby was yet within his mother, absolutely at one with her body, breathing, and mind. For him it feels right to be held, kept close, and directly included in what is going on around him.

But it often happens in the lives of the newborn that they are almost deprived of the strongest sensation they can know—contact! It is as if the cutting of the umbilical cord signals not only the baby's opportunity to breathe and eat with his own body but also to get on in the world as an independent being. He's swiftly carried off for an examination and then deposited in a private box to fend for himself in the experience of emotional deprivation. But isn't it enough to ask him to come out into the world, without having to separate him from significant contact with the mother, his former home and continuing link to survival? Surely, he can't be comfortable alone, and what can he glean from the other babies that might surround him in a nursery, except perhaps that some share a kindred state of isolation?

After the coming of our son, Masashi, onto a futon on the floor of a tatami room in the home of a midwife in Japan, we slept together, him in my arms, for ten hours on the same futon. We have slept together on either our own futon or a mattress on someone else's floor every single night since then. Now, at two

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The author and her son Masashi

years and four months, he goes to his own place in our room and has just begun to sleep through the night without crawling over to me. Masashi never had to overcome the fear of falling from a bed, nor ever had his imagination, body, and mind abruptly halted by the bars of a crib or playpen. Perhaps that is why he is a great and fearless mover. And he never had to cope with going to sleep or waking up consistently with nobody in sight. Perhaps that is why, though such a wee fellow, he is so free—he always speaks first to strangers.

Masashi's birth was quite a happy one, and so it was with all of the babies born in that midwife's home; for even the infants of mothers who could not sleep with them were not put aside. The dear old midwife, at 65 years of age and stemming from a long line of midwives on her maternal side, had more than enough of a mother's heart and mind to sleep with the babies herself. Her bed, for all of her midwife life, was next to those babies; and over the years she tended thousands in their first days and nights of life on earth lest they wake up

needing someone. She gave me the one essential key to motherhood.

But the experience of birth is not so happy for other babies who number in the millions, the majority, born in American hospitals and relegated to nurseries for periodical checking by masked creatures of hopefully good intentions but perhaps mistaken methods. That isolating mentality is another unnatural product of the scientific atmosphere pervading birth in an American hospital. What happens to the spiritual aspects of a birth muted in a laboratory-like delivery room? It seems that maternity wards *manufacture* people rather than help mothers let them emerge into this world. Couldn't the room for birth be more similar to the womb: more dark than light, more warm in mood than coolly antiseptic, more natural than metallic in sound, more filled with family than strangers? Birth is like the baby's entry into a new country, but wouldn't all of us be hesitant to disembark in, say,

**The masculine pronouns are used because the authors' baby is a boy.*

China, to the glare of fluorescent lighting and the sting of metal after a safe and smooth ocean cruise? It is of course a great shock to be born, a shock that can be a most positive awakening into humanity, but to encounter technology at the second of birth seems to be going too far and too fast.

Even at home the process of alienation continues. With dismay I see parents themselves not comprehending the dependent nature and physical needs of a baby. He is confined to his own space, a crib or pen, plus bureau, bathtub, and playthings before he can even see with his eyes let alone hold a toy. He hasn't any idea where he is, except that he's removed. It seems a kind of punishment for having come here.

If security is given through contact, communication, and participation when it is most wanted—from the time of birth to about three years of age—there will be much less adolescent anxiety and creeping existential feelings later on. If the baby is delivered in his own home, or at least in a homey room, by a mother who is awake and not drugged—fully there to first give and then receive him—it is likely that the baby will feel good that he came. And following that, if he is respected at home for what he is—a baby, not a tiny adult—he can do his job of being a baby well enough to give him a good start on doing the jobs of being a child, a teenager, and finally a mature adult.

Breastfeeding is essential for that kind of security, and it seems to work out better if it is not regulated but "on demand." The baby knows when he needs milk or the breast, just as he knows when he's ready to give it up. My son breastfed until he was just a week or so past two, and as we have traveled a lot since his birth, it was really hard for him to let go of the breast—the one sure hold on his base. I talked to him gently about that—how milk is for babies and that he was quite a nice little boy now—and he decided to become a boy. I could see that he pondered it a great deal and really considered the pros and cons of giving up babyhood, but he finally chose in favor of taking on boyhood.

Babies know what they can manage to do or not do and their signs are clear and physical. Just as the umbilical cord stops pulsating and grows dry when it's ready to be cut, so do the baby's neck, hands, spine, teeth, legs, anus muscles, and brain let his parents know when he's ready for holding up his head, holding on, sitting, eating, eating cereal

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... BABY

grains, standing, controlling urine, and making choices. He has a rhythm of growth that is his own and if it is imposed upon or made dissonant without consulting him and his rate, it will sound a discordance deep within his nervous system.

These signs assure us that there is wisdom to life, that nature is neither random nor without meaning. The signs are as visible as the oil covering the skin of a just-born baby. The strength of that oil tells us that if the baby were to be born outside in winter he could survive. It is his protection, like a fur coat on an animal, and he deserves to keep it. A baby is not dirty and doesn't need to be soaped. Perhaps some rice bran wrapped in gauze or soft cheesecloth to make a milky suds might be nice at bathtime, but soaps, oils, and even powders shouldn't be necessary, as long as his food is correct.

The signs of a baby's day-to-day health can be felt with your hands and seen in his bowel movements. If when a baby is held under the neck and lower back there is a sense of heaviness that is not merely weight but real solidity and power, he is in good condition. If he feels light or airy, there's some imbalance, usually emotional or physical. If he has diarrhea, warm rice can be put on his navel for up to ten minutes; for constipation you can gently pull and stretch the baby's right leg to stimulate the intestines. If the baby throws up or has a stomach ache, his food or method of feeding is wrong, or his mind is anxious. Is there too much or too little polarity in the home? When a baby is disturbed it is only natural to bring him to your heart where he can find comfort. A warm bath, the mother's heartbeat, and the palms of her hands are the most natural instruments of healing. In any case of distress, the family should simplify their diet, especially the mother, for as long as she is breastfeeding.

Just as the baby exhibits physical signs of his readiness for change and development, so does the body of the new mother. Even if she has been physically active throughout the pregnancy (see April *EWJ* and exercises following) the mother ought to take it easy for some days after the birth, no matter how energetic and elated she might feel with her new motherhood. During the first week, her pelvis is closing, and if her weight in

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walking is put upon it, it will be strained to return to its normal position. Such strain might later manifest itself as abdominal expansion, dropped organs, incorrect posture, and a tendency to overeat. It's really better for the mother not to walk at all for three to four days or at least until her body temperature is the same under both arms for three consecutive readings. The armpit temperature is directly related to the state of the pelvis, and as each side of the pelvis is closing at a different rate, the temperature will be different under each arm until both sides of the pelvis have closed equally. Then she can get around gradually.

Once the mother is on her feet, she can do some light stretching exercise to stimulate her circulation, but she need not exert herself during the period throughout which she is still bleeding. Then it is best to keep the abdomen wrapped and warm, even in summer, and she really should avoid taking a bath, washing her hair, or doing any kind of work that involves water. Water on the outside cools the body inside, and the pelvis and abdomen need maximum warmth to heal and return to normal. When the bleeding stops, the daily work can be picked up and a program of exercises (such as follows) practiced.

In the first thirteen months after birth, during which the basic portion of the baby's consciousness is being formed, the mother and baby are daily discovering new and interesting aspects of each other. These are, therefore, the most valuable months for securing a mutually trusting, stable, and educational relationship between the parents and child that will enable the child to eventually manage his own life. The baby wants to discover and enjoy the world of his home. Let him follow his curiosity, as his joy is to take it all in. He can be carried with you from room to room, feeling secure in your presence, and be put on the floor, thus freeing his senses to roam and explore. His profession is "growth and expansion" and his techniques are sensation and movement. There is no kindness in frustrating this work. He has lived in the very center of his mother's being for nine months. Surely he needn't now be treated as a caged alien or restricted guest in her home. The baby who feels himself a member of the family—eating, sleeping, looking, listening, moving, feeling, and doing together with Mom and Dad—is likely to be a happy baby in a fortunate home and later on a healthy adult in a peaceful world. ■



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... BABY

These exercises are divided into two groups. The first group is designed to make the pelvis and ribcage more flexible and open and should be done during pregnancy. The second group is designed to contract the pelvis and ribcage after your baby has been born. A fuller description of preparations for natural childbirth appeared in the April, 1980 issue of *EWJ*.

Lie on stomach with hands beside the chest, palms to the floor. Inhale while forehead touches the floor, raise forehead and chest while exhaling. Repeat several times. This exercise should not be done in advanced pregnancy.



With palms together on chest and soles of feet touching, stretch open the knees and inhale. Stretch out arms and legs while exhaling. Repeat 20-30 times.

With palms to the floor, place right knee on left leg, raise right knee, and inhale. Exhale and lower knee to horizontal. Repeat and do the same exercise on the left. Do this exercise more often on your tighter or stiffer side.



Preparation for the exercises:

1. Wait at least two hours after eating.
2. Go to the toilet.
3. Relax your mind and body.
4. Do 10 minutes of warming-up movement.

While doing the exercises:

1. Breathe out with each movement, making the exhalation long and deep.
2. Concentrate your mind on the part being stimulated: pelvis, lower back, etc.
3. Relax 30-60 seconds after performing each exercise.
4. Keep your face relaxed.



Inhale while in sitting posture with heels beside hips and hands behind neck. Quickly sit up while exhaling and push pelvis forward, opening chest.



Fish pose: While lying on your back, bend elbows, make fists, and arch the spine, touching head to the floor. Place big toes together and open heels. Inhale while raising legs, then exhale and lower legs almost to the floor. Repeat 10-15 times.

Inhale deeply from abdomen. Open legs, put backs of hands together, and straighten arms above body. While exhaling from lower abdomen, sit up and stretch arms forward. Toes should turn in.

