Information Overload

by Robin Sale

If you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant, you'll notice there's no lack of information or advice to guide you. The world wide web has many thousands of pages chock full of expert advice, warnings, chat rooms, etc. to learn everything you'll ever need to know and a whole lot you'll never need to know.

On a recent visit to the local bookstore I counted 132 birth related books! Welcome to the information age! When our grandmothers were pregnant, any request for information was most often met with a conciliatory admonishment not to worry, "You're in good hands! Leave the worrying to the experts." In the past few decades many women and more than a few men have worked hard for a women's right to understand her own body and to know what to expect from her birth experience. Today we are richly blessed by their efforts.

But can too much information hurt? Recently, I've heard many pregnant women speak of the dizzying and exhausting effects of information-overload. Not only is there more information than one person can possibly process in a pregnancy, but there is also plenty of conflicting opinions. One expert will emphatically state the exact opposite perspective of another highly respected author. To sleep on your back? left side only? or any way you're comfortable? To watch your weight gain or follow your appetite? To jog or walk? Lamaze or Bradley Method of childbirth education? Add to this the mix of new technologies and tests to learn about and you might as well make it a full time job. Well, life is full of choices isn't it? But when it comes to something with as much personal impact as giving birth, how is one to choose?

Information gathered is useful to the degree that it allows a woman to understand the normalcy of birth, to lessen any concerns she may have about the upcoming event and to know what her choices are regarding her birth. Here are some suggestions that may be helpful to you while wading through our flooded information highways.

Ask yourself:

- Am I the kind of person who finds comfort in thoroughly researching a topic? The operative word here is comfort.
- Do I pour through books for information only to find myself feeling more anxious than before?
- Do I learn best by reading personal accounts of others who have given birth?

- Are the books I'm reading "fear based?" In other words, do they concentrate on the pitfalls and dangers rather than the normal birth process?
- Is the class I'm taking causing me to be more afraid or more encouraged?

Finally, it may help to know that a woman doesn't think her way through labor. It's not an intellectual event. In the introduction to her book, Birthing From Within, Pam England writes "...no mother in the heat of labor is experiencing "stages" or depending on her knowledge of anatomy and physiology to guide her." Balance your mental preparation with some emotional, physical and spiritual nurturing. There is another kind of knowing, a cellular intelligence, that can only be known by dropping down beneath the thinking mind. You might call it the body mind.

You can learn from this "body of knowledge" in times of stillness and silence. Go outside and observe the ways of the natural world, the waves of the ocean, the budding trees. If we trust these natural processes to unfold maybe we can trust our own nature to birth our babies. Remember, you are a part of this unfolding world and you are the greatest expert when it comes to your birth. No amount of reading or classes will tell you how your birth will unfold. As you look for information, seek out books and classes that help you to deepen your confidence and trust in your body's natural abilities. The most vital information you'll ever need in labor was given to you with the XX chromosomes at your conception - a gift, if you will, from your great, great, great grandmothers.

Robin Sale, CHT, is a counselor and hypnotherapist working with women and couples preparing for birth and parenthood as well as teaching prenatal yoga and support classes in Santa Cruz and Los Gatos.

© 2000 Robin Sale - Whole Birth Resources