

Trends

Months of bliss

ALTHOUGH I am a regular Mary Poppins most of the time, now and then I don't find it so easy to relish life's little enjoyments and fulfilments. It's strange, but there it is. A parking ticket on my windscreen can do it, the rubbish man failing to come for the third week in a row can do it, the cat choosing to kill a mouse under the bed at 3am can do it. But never pregnancy.

Luckily, pregnancy is one of those times in life when you feel blissfully happy all the time, and fulfilled. I know this because it's what everyone tells me, especially books on the subject. They tell me that I glow. They tell me that my hormones may make me a little moody, but mainly, they tell me that I glow. Even without the rouge. And if I don't, they say I should.

Pregnancy books are full of "shoulds". They say women should enjoy having babies, shouldn't put on too much weight, should breastfeed, should drink quarts of milk a day, should go for walks, should give up work, should have a nap every afternoon, should swallow cocktail cabinets full of vitamin pills, should feel like a contented cow, should eat plenty of roughage, should slap wheatgerm in parts unmentionable.

They brook no argument. Unlike any other books you may read about how you should behave, pregnancy books have a blackmail weapon over your head. They intimate that your child will die unless you do everything they say to the letter, especially enjoy your pregnancy. You must enjoy your pregnancy, birth, and baby, or it will be your fault when it grows up to be a chronic bed-wetter. Pregnancy books hint dark hints about affecting the baby's state of mind in the womb itself, which is why I have turned into a Mary Poppins. I am only reading Enid Blyton books, for fear of causing damage to the foetal intellect.

I have worked out a way of regarding everything about pregnancy as fun, no matter what. I have taken all those shoulds to heart.

I call it fun when I go to the loo every five minutes, all day. It was most fun of all in the winter months, when my backside was on the verge of frostbite. I love having to get up in the night to pee, and hunting for loos when I'm in strange parts of town. It's a challenge. I find it particularly challenging and amusing when I have several layers of clothes on, and I'm in a hurry.

Fun is growing too big for your favourite clothes, and working out what you're going to wear for the rest of the pregnancy. You can be a counter-culture Earth Mother and wear long Indian dresses from the markets, or you can wear the suburban uniform of stretch-top trousers with matching jumpers and natty little



floral smocks that go over the lot and accentuate your hump. Underneath, you wear maternity bras. They are great fun, too.

Maternity bras look like the bras your mother used to wear that came to the top of her corset. They have wide straps, and flaps for poking bosoms through, or dozens of hooks and eyes for undoing in front. Still, it's fun to have the bust of a 50-year-old woman long before your time. Especially when none of your shirts will do up over it.

I get a kick out of watching my varicose veins get worse, and doing

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contortions from the *Kama Sutra* so I can shave my legs. And I get a real buzz out of cutting my toenails.

I relish the challenges of making my clothes last a few weeks longer by resorting to safety pins and bits of elastic where people can't see. They don't write pregnancy books about women like me who can't afford a whole new wardrobe.

Antenatal classes are fun, too, if you get to them. My local hospital runs them in the afternoons, which means you can't go to them if you work. Still, as everyone knows, all of us pregnant women are at home with no worries on our minds, downing two pints of milk a day without putting on any weight, taking our afternoon naps, and just reading Noddy books.

There are many things to enjoy about the extra weight of pregnancy. Firstly, there is the new antenatal dictum that we can't put on more than a stone and a half at the most, which means we can eat happily and freely all the things we like. Then there's having to move everywhere slowly, not carrying heavy things ever, and best of all dropping small things like clothespins that you have to pick up, or spilling the cat's milk. Cleaning that up can take half a day of merri-ment.

It's a ball going from being efficient to taking ages to do everything, and needing naps in between. Naturally, none of us pregnant women get frustrated about it. We enjoy.

So far as I can see, there is only one thing that we're not allowed to enjoy, and that's sex. It doesn't go with Enid Blyton somehow. I know this, because among my reading matter is the handout the Health Department gives us all, called "You and Your Baby". It tells me that sex is best avoided in the first three months, and the last three months, and the subsequent six weeks. A mere seven and a half months. It's enough to make any pregnant woman glow.

Mind you, it gives us that much extra time for knitting those little garments us pregnant women all knit like mad. Personally, my only worry is whether to make them pink or blue.

I could lose sleep over it, because Noddy books offer no advice at all.

ROSEMARY McLEOD

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