

Want to know how to best nurture your newborn? The first step is to...

# Trust your instincts

The arrival of a new baby is an exciting event, but it can also be worrying for new parents, especially if they've never had anything to do with babies before. The plethora of parenting information around coupled with the advice from well-meaning friends and family, can seem overwhelming, confusing and even contradictory. Some parents soon begin to doubt their own abilities.

But Rhodanthe (pronounced Row-dan-thee) Lipsett, infant and maternal health specialist from Canberra, believes we know more than we think and encourages us to tune into our own instincts. The author of a



handbook for parents called *No One Right Way – Nurturing Your New Baby in the First Three Months of Life*, says birth and parenting is a natural process and we all have innate abilities.

"Giving mothers permission to believe that they know what is best for their baby after the first week or so, is enormously important," she says, "because their confidence in themselves is very shaky and so easily shattered by people implying they're doing the wrong thing."

"If you can support a mother's confidence and belief in herself, the interaction between the mother and baby is going to be optimal."

## Information for understanding

The greatest thing new mothers need, says Rhodanthe, besides help and support, is relevant information for establishing a nurturing relationship with their babies. Yet when first asked by her patients to write her advice down, she resisted, believing there were enough parenting books available. But her patients persisted, saying the existing literature

## 5 PRINCIPLES FOR NURTURING A BABY

Your baby needs to:

- **Grow – if not growing, check if it's because of insufficient or unsuitable food or a medical reason**
- **Receive lots of body contact – she'll love holding and cuddling**
- **Be as comfortable as possible**
  - **Feel safe and secure**
  - **Enjoy appropriate interaction**

covered 0 to 5 years and what they wanted was information specific to the first few weeks.

This is what inspired Rhodanthe to set about writing her book. The initial chapters cover pre-pregnancy, pregnancy and birth and while Rhodanthe recommends parents be prepared, she urges them not to be disappointed if things don't go to plan. She says just go with the flow of nature.

The book then provides everything you need to know to care for your newborn, including feeding, settling, sleeping and communicating with your baby.

## No one right way

Rhodanthe's key message is that there is no 'one right way' to care for a newborn

– every mother and baby is different. "Take from the information what is right for you and your baby, in your particular circumstances." She says don't get upset over confusing or conflicting advice, but keep an open mind. Experiment with different techniques and you'll eventually find what works best for you and your baby, but remain flexible, as what worked today may not work tomorrow.

She understands that parenting decisions which appear simple pre-birth can seem insurmountable to a new mother who is dealing with unexpected problems like exhaustion, weepiness, sore stitches, haemorrhoids, persistent bleeding and painful breasts.

So she encourages parents to seek advice if they need it, question anything they don't understand and request a second opinion if desired. Search out professionals who are supportive, skilled, knowledgeable, and in whom you have confidence.



While the learning curve is steep she says that “providing you are loving and gentle in your care you are unlikely to make any serious mistakes”.

### **Nurturing your newborn**

There are five basic principles of nurturing a newborn (see left). To illustrate these, Rhodanthe used to ask her patients to visualise a litter of puppies or kittens. “If there is an unhappy baby what does the mother do? Feed it. If it’s still miserable she’ll make it comfortable by licking it all over (not that I suggested this!). Then she’ll nose the

baby in against her body and curl up around it as if to say ‘I’m looking after you’.”

### **Support for mums**

Rhodanthe is passionate about the care of mothers. When working at Canberra’s Queen Elizabeth II Postnatal Hospital with mothers and babies on day visits, she always asked the mums, “And how are you?” She was astounded at the number of mothers who said “You’re the first person who’s asked me that since the baby was born”.

She says taking care of yourself is essential when looking after a new baby,

otherwise tiredness can affect thinking, which can lead to irritability. Eating can be inadequate which can exacerbate the problem. Accept all offers of assistance and don’t be afraid to ask for help. Single mothers or those with no family nearby may have to seek help from neighbours, mothers’ groups, or support groups.

### **Communication and companionship**

“It’s very important for mothers, if they’re feeling lonely or anxious, to make an effort to contact somebody,” says Rhodanthe. Realising you’re not the only one finding life with a new baby difficult can be reassuring. A variety of comments from new parents are included in the book.

*A donation from the sale of each book assists indigenous women with midwifery. ❀*

### **HOW TO FEEL GOOD ABOUT YOURSELF**

- Eat sufficient balanced nutritious food. Keep wholesome snacks in the fridge and simple meals in the freezer.
- Lessen tiredness and reduce fatigue. Don’t stand when you can sit. Try to sleep when baby sleeps.
- Reduce expectations of yourself. Take time to enjoy your baby, they won’t stay little for long. Decide this will be a happy time.
- Ask for and accept help.
- Recognise and enjoy the good moments.
- Banish feelings of guilt. No mother is perfect. ‘Good enough’ is okay.
- Arrange time out. Let someone else care for baby while you go out, garden or just relax in the bath.

**No One Right Way** (See Change Publishing, \$35). For stockists phone 02 6674 0211

### **Tips for relaxing when feeling anxious.**

- 1. Take slow, quiet, deep breaths**
- 2. Relax your face – your forehead, eyes and jaw and then your shoulders, arms, wrists and hands**
- 3. Be aware of your self-talk – try to make it calming and positive such as ‘I’m doing fine’ or ‘this feeling will pass’**