



ISSUE# 11

Article 4 : Approaching Birth

The end of pregnancy can be a fulfilling time when you feel calm, blissful and increasingly ready to welcome your baby. Many women feel especially well and enjoy these last few weeks, when the baby's movements are so much more obvious.

When you relax, you will find yourself looking down at the heaving bumps and lumps inside you, wondering if that was a foot or an elbow! As the birth draws closer you may be longing to see and hold your baby.

You and your partner can relish these final weeks alone as a kind of second honeymoon before the arrival of your new baby. If you already have a child or children this is a good time to enjoy being together before the new baby arrives and demands a lot of your attention.

The last six weeks of pregnancy can also be an uncomfortable or frustrating time as your belly becomes huge and it's less easy to move around

This is especially true if you have a lively toddler to pick up and care for and you can't rest whenever you feel like it. (First time mums make the most of the luxury of being able to rest when you want to!) You may feel irritable and increasingly fed up with being pregnant, as if you have had this baby inside you forever.

Waking at night to empty your bladder and then not being able to get back sleep with your mind churning is a common occurrence. It may be best to get up for a while and have a warm milky drink or a camomile tea and to take a rest in the day when you feel tired.

Your body is preparing to breastfeed a baby at night, so try to go with the unusual rhythms if you can. If you have another child or children, perhaps you can arrange some extra child care so that you get a rest every day now.

As your baby's head settles into the pelvic brim, there may be discomfort, aching or a feeling of fullness and heaviness in the lower abdomen or an achy feeling in the lower back.

With a first baby the head usually 'engages' some time in the last 6 weeks although there are some babies who wait till the last minute to descend. Second or consequent babies tend to engage much later, possibly not until labour starts.

You may feel some contractions that are stronger than usual when your baby's head engages. Sometimes it seems obvious from the outside that the baby has 'dropped' and breathing gets easier with less pressure on the ribs and more in the pelvis. It's as though nature gently takes your awareness down to the main parts of your body that are involved in birthing.

Your midwife will be able to check how far the head has descended, by gently feeling the head with her hands from the outside of your lower abdomen, to see how many 'fifths' of the head are still palpable. Braxton Hicks contractions are likely to become stronger as they press the baby's head against the cervix making it soften and ripen in readiness for the birth.

If your pregnancy goes on beyond 41 weeks you may find yourself under pressure to induce the birth. Issue no 14 will give you all the information you need if this happens.

Physical signs of getting closer to pre-labour include runs of mild contractions, diarrhoea, low back pain or period like pains, increased mucous discharge from the vagina, which may be bloodstained. This may be all or part of the mucous plug that seals the cervix during pregnancy.

Anticipating the birth may give you tons of energy and a feeling of excitement or you may find yourself needing to sleep a lot. It's also natural to experience some anxiety and concerns about what life is going to be like after the birth.

You may well find yourself wondering if you are going to have an intuitive maternal instinct, whether you will be able to cope with a real live baby who is not neatly packaged in the womb. You may be nervous about bringing your

baby home from hospital or being on your own with him or her.

Having a new baby to care for certainly changes your life. Like anything new and challenging, it is going to take time to find your way and get used to being a new mum or dad. While some parents adapt easily, many find the impact of 24 hour care and interrupted sleep difficult at first.

Life will settle down as your baby gets used to being in the world and parenting does get easier. It's really helpful to spend time with a new mother and father and their baby while you are still pregnant. If possible, ask a new mum you know if you can come over for half a day, just to see what an ordinary day is like with a baby.

Spending time and talking with mothers will help you to have realistic expectations. Mothering is instinctive, but it is also a learned skill. Ideally we would learn about looking after babies from the example of other women as we are growing up ourselves.

However, in our culture this rarely happens. If you haven't had much contact with babies, look for opportunities in your neighbourhood to meet new parents...maybe at local postnatal groups or through your local baby clinic.

Even if you adore being with your baby, you are going to need some time for yourself and some purely adult stimulation, so some planning for this now is a good idea. You will want to know where to go with your baby after the birth too and now may be the best time to research what's available for parents and young babies in your area.

© copyright Janet Balaskas 2004

[active birth centre](#) | [shopping](#) | [main page](#) | [article 1](#) | [article 2](#) | [article 3](#) | [article 4](#) | [article 5](#) | [article 6](#) | [contact us](#)

Active Birth Centre 25 Bickerton Road London N19 5JT Tel: 020 7281 6760 Fax: 020 7263 8098
www.activebirthcentre.com or mail@activebirthcentre.com