

Your belly grows, your mind slows,
and your urge to bake cakes is insatiable.

No question, you're pregnant.

In pregnancy, there are physical and emotional changes. There are wonders at the baby you are growing. And worries about birth and beyond.

Jodie Benveniste, psychologist and mother of two, helps you enjoy the wonders, and calm the worries.

Her reflections and gentle affirmations comfort and inspire so you can bake the cake and eat it too!

Praise for *Little Bundle*:

'Dip into *Little Bundle* for reassurance, comfort, and companionship in the middle of the night'

Robyn Barker author of *Baby Love*

'Every page is sure to bring relief to parents a bit overwhelmed by life with a new baby.'

Pregnancy & Birth magazine

'An invaluable parenting guide.'

Shopping for Baby magazine

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Full Belly Jodie Benveniste

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Parent Wellbeing

From the author of '**Little Bundle**':
Comfort and inspiration for new parents

Full Belly

comfort
and **inspiration**
for pregnancy and birth



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Introduction



I always thought I'd have kids. It was a matter of when – not if. In my 20s, I studied at uni, travelled overseas, began a career in consulting, developed many close and wonderful friendships, met my life partner, and generally had fun. The most responsibility I had was paying the rent, turning up to work on time, and making sure there was milk in the fridge. Not much responsibility at all.

Then I hit 30, and my outlook changed. I began caring about my health. I visited a naturopath, changed my diet, and began jogging rather than walking. I also examined my career. I cut back on consulting, began more research, and launched a freelance writing business.

Unbeknownst to me, I was planning for pregnancy. I was preparing my body, mind and lifestyle for a major life change. Within months it hit me. I didn't want a baby – I *had* to have one! It was hormonal, emotional and not at all rational. My husband wilfully agreed to 'start trying', and within a month I was pregnant.

Then the real changes began. The nausea, fatigue, and memory loss. The changing body weight, body shape, and wardrobe. The 'don't bother me with your meaningless problems, I'm growing a baby right now', and the 'give me a seat on the bus or I'll hit you with my handbag', and the 'I need to eat half a chicken right now!' kind of changes.

Being a writer and a book lover, I turned to books for help. I read voraciously, trying to connect my mind to the physical changes I was experiencing. I read about my baby's development, discovered my pelvic floor and, later in my pregnancy when it was too late to avoid I read about how to birth a baby.

Then my baby arrived, and my life *really* changed. My breasts became refrigerators, my mind turned to mush, and my tear ducts were turned on –

permanently. None of the books prepared me for the emotional rollercoaster ride.

My response was to write *Little Bundle: Comfort and inspiration for new parents* – the book I wished I had as new parent. I wanted to support and reassure new parents, and help them care for their baby confidently.

But after finishing *Little Bundle*, I realised I'd missed an important step along the parenthood timeline. I'd ignored the part that begins with a positive pregnancy test, and ends with a baby in your arms. I'd overlooked pregnancy, preparing for baby, and labour and birth. So here is *Little Bundle's* prequel.

Full Belly recognises that becoming a parent begins long before your baby's birth. It maps the highs and lows, whimsy and worries, and thrills and ordeals of pregnancy by discussing the emotional and not just the medical changes.

I hope *Full Belly* supports and reassures so you make the best decisions for yourself and your growing family. Because the journey into parenthood, although fraught at times, is rich and revealing. Let the journey begin ...

Your body

'You learn something every day if you pay attention.' RAY LEBLOND

We live in our body everyday, but how often do we really listen to it? Do we always sleep when we feel tired? Do we always eat when we feel hungry? And how often do we relax when we feel stressed?

I lived in my body for 30 years before I paid much attention to it. Most days, I took it for granted. Then, if it stopped working properly, and I got injured or ill, I complained.

But during pregnancy, I truly connected with my body. I learnt new respect. I tuned into how I was feeling, and I responded to its demands. My body was creating a baby, and I was in awe.

During pregnancy you cannot ignore your body. You must listen. You must sleep when you feel tired, eat when you feel hungry, and relax if you feel stressed. Your body and your baby demand it. You don't have a choice. You must comply.



My body is performing miracles. I will listen and heed its demands.

Your relationship

'It seems essential, in relationships and all tasks, that we concentrate only on what is most significant and important.' SOREN KIERKEGAARD

Babies are never a relationship elixir. If anything, the strain, stress, and enormous life changes that babies bring can fracture rather than foster even the best relationship. Fears, anxieties, hopes and hormones can create rifts and fuel doubts. Will my partner support me? Will he/she be a good enough father/mother? If we can't agree on where the baby sleeps, then how will we decide where our child goes to school?

During my first pregnancy, after I'd read my 12th pregnancy book, and my husband had read none, I doubted how prepared he'd be for labour, birth and our new baby. After giving him yet another neglected book, I got angry. 'You're not taking this seriously. You don't understand. You don't care!' Of course he cared. But his way of caring didn't involve buying out the bookstore – or even reading a single book.

The transition from person to parent is a challenging one for you, your partner, and your relationship. And the challenge only heightens once your baby is born. There is now a third person in your relationship. The duo expands to a trio, adding complexity but also depth to the relationship. The way to ride out the rifts and eradicate the doubts is to talk, listen, and listen some more.



By talking and listening to my partner, our relationship is a source of strength rather than grief, as we welcome our baby into the world.

Expectations

'Keep high aspirations, moderate expectations, and small needs.' WILLIAM HOWARD STEIN

Do you dream what life will be like with your new baby? Do your dreams involve sipping lattes in the sun with other mums while your perfect cherub sleeps peacefully? Or do they involve endless nappy changing, cleaning up vomit, and feeling like you've been run over by a truck?

When heavily pregnant, I was invited to a new parent group. There I met a roomful of amazing looking mums and even more amazing looking babies. They made motherhood look, well, amazing. When my baby was born, I did experience some amazing moments, but I also experienced many challenging, frustrating and exhausting moments too. I hadn't expected those.

Envisioning, dreaming and imagining a wonderful life with your new baby is one of pregnancy's privileges. Indulge. But know that as with anything in life that is truly rewarding, there are associated difficulties.



I look forward to kissing and cuddling my new baby, but I know that caring for a baby involves more than kisses and cuddles.

Emotions

'Human behaviour flows from three main sources: desire, emotion, and knowledge.' PLATO

Emotions can run rife during pregnancy. Reading about a sick toddler leads to sobbing, hearing about a preschooler in a car accident leads to panic about your unborn baby's safety, and news of an abducted child leads to anger and disbelief.

Before becoming pregnant, it seemed easier to divorce myself from human tragedies by thinking 'that won't happen to me'. But with a baby on the way, and feeling suddenly responsible for another life, I couldn't be so dismissive. It may not happen to me, but what if it happened to my child?

Perhaps you can blame hormones for your raw emotions. Perhaps not. But experiencing powerful emotions in pregnancy is the beginning of your journey into parenthood – a place where you connect more intimately with the human condition, and you experience emotions like never before.



Although my emotions sometimes surprise me, I don't let them overwhelm me.

Preparing for parenthood

'For one human being to love another; that is perhaps the most difficult of our tasks; the ultimate, the last test and proof; the work for which all other work is but preparation.' **RAINER MARIA RILKE**

They say nothing can truly prepare you for parenthood. It is such an incredible, transformational life-changing event. You experience emotions you've never felt before, such as a deep, unfathomable love for your child that either hits instantly or grows over time. And you experience things you never have before, like pacing the hallway at three in the morning trying to settle an inconsolable baby.

I spent nine months preparing for my baby's arrival, or so I thought. But the night my first baby was born, I was not prepared. Now I realise that I was so focused on the labour and birth, I paid little attention to what happens immediately afterwards. I'd managed to birth a baby, but I didn't know how to look after one.

It is common to be so preoccupied and concerned with the birth that you give only passing thought to those hours, days and months after the birth. In this case, a little bit of preparation can go a long way.



I may not truly understand what life will be like after the birth, but I'm willing to learn what I can before my baby arrives.

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