



The Whole Pregnancy Handbook: An Obstetrician's Guide to Integrating Conventional and Alternative Medicine Before, During, and After Pregnancy

By Joel M. Evans, MD, and Robin Aronson. New York: Gotham Books, 2005. 576 pages. \$20.00, paperback.

Reviewed by: Rachel O'Hanlon, SNM.

In *The Whole Pregnancy Handbook*, Evans and Aronson provide a comprehensive look at the childbearing spectrum, from infertility and preconception to pregnancy and postpartum. The book is intelligent, without seeming dry. Contributions from experts in diverse health-related fields, including midwifery, add to its authenticity. As the book comes recommended by the likes of Christiane Northrup, Bernie Siegel, and Michel Odent, this reviewer had high expectations, which, for the most part, were fulfilled.

In an introduction, Evans employs an old literary device to gain the reader's confidence. Confessing his personal inadequacies in a benevolent and forgivable voice, he tells how early in his career he had used a conventional and rather dogmatic approach in his obstetric practice. By his own account, he made a complete turnabout after an experience with a postpartum patient, who taught him, through her dissatisfaction, that he needed to spend more time listening to his patients and following their lead during pregnancy. *The Whole Pregnancy Handbook* is evidence of that turnaround. Its message hinges on the values of autonomy and empowerment in prenatal care.

The book is divided into two parts. The first six chapters cover infertility and preconception care and make up part one. The second part covers all of pregnancy and postpartum and consists of 17 chapters. Given the natural order and sequencing of the book, one would think reading it from beginning to end would be appropriate. However, simply opening the book at random yields valuable information of interest to providers and to the women attempting or experiencing pregnancy for whom the book was written. The lay reader will especially appreciate the voices of real women interspersed frequently throughout the book, relating personal experiences of pregnancy.

Evans gives more than a nod to alternative modalities, recommending chiropractic, acupuncture, osteopathy, herbalism, and traditional Chinese medicine, depending on the presenting need of the woman. Furthermore, his embrace of Holism is evident throughout as he addresses

the spiritual, emotional, and psychological components of a healthy approach to pregnancy. Evans offers several pages of practical advice to readers searching for an alternative practitioner including where to look, what to look for in the area of licensing and accreditation, and how to know what type of practitioner is a good match for you.

The reader will find that Evans places an important emphasis on preconception care, covering the basics such as genetic screening and folic acid supplementation. But he goes into depth on the topic of emotional preparedness for pregnancy and parenthood. Several chapters focus primarily on fertility awareness and fertility challenges, making it an excellent resource for women trying to achieve pregnancy.

Nutritional guidelines are extensive and include tables listing iron-, protein-, and calcium-rich foods. The coverage is practical, with shopping lists and sample menus, as well as theoretical. Evans broaches the debate between conventional and holistic practitioners regarding the prevalence of dairy sensitivity and the theoretical connection between cow's milk and autoimmune disease. Neither overzealous nor lukewarm in his presentation, Evans speaks to the need for balance. Emphasizing the need for a "clean" and highly nutritious diet in pregnancy, he admits that an apple a day is a good thing but that sometimes you may need a cookie.

The book will appeal to the alternative health care consumer and mainstream types alike, and although much of its information will be directed to the consumer, providers may find enough value between its covers to make space for this new volume on their reference shelves. This reviewer found a chapter devoted to herbal therapies for common illnesses in pregnancy particularly useful. In the chapter on medical complications of pregnancy, Evans discusses promising, although as yet unstudied, nutritional interventions for mild preeclampsia including supplementation with antioxidants, calcium, folic acid, and essential fatty acids. Providers may concur that interventions of this type fall into the category of useful complementary approaches to conventional medical treatment. Overall, *The Whole Pregnancy Handbook* presents a reasonable framework onto which providers can build their own approach to women's health during pregnancy, balancing their clients' needs and desires for alternative therapies with the medical protocols to which practitioners are often bound.