

Nursing Your Baby

By Elizabeth Brown

AMERICAN women have been charged, recently, in fairly harsh terms, with refusing to nurse their babies. And the implication is that they are vain, selfish, lazy or, to say the least, uninformed.

The last of these reasons—and only the last, I think—is true. Women are uninformed about nursing. It isn't by any means so simple as the books say. It's a difficult, perplexing, sometimes dismaying experience. There's nothing natural about it, if you think of natural processes as occurring effortlessly. But for the mother who surmounts these obstacles, nursing her baby is a rich, a glowing experience, bringing with it an incomparable sense of peace and completion.

Medical men, psychologists and almost every mother who has nursed her baby agree on the wisdom of nursing. The baby's greatly increased chances of staying well during the first year, and of developing into a happy, confident child, are matched by the mother's own deep sense of fulfillment. But too many mothers are uninformed on the first point and so never discover the second. I am convinced that if women were better prepared for the problems of nursing and realized the immense satisfactions to be gained from it, a much larger number would insist on breast-feeding their babies.

My own experience is typical, I think, and perhaps will indicate how the obstacles to nursing can, with a little foreknowledge and planning, be overcome, and what a rewarding experience awaits the woman who nurses her baby. Indeed, it now seems to me that to bottle-feed your baby when you can nurse him is like adopting a baby when you can have one of your own.

My first child was born several years ago. I was under the care of a well-known obstetrician, and I carried out his instructions carefully. But he was concerned only with getting me through a successful delivery. He told me nothing of the problems of nursing which were ahead of me. He mentioned in the course of an examination that I had one poor nipple, but said nothing more. I had the vague and disconcerting feeling that something was not quite right, but it wore off presently and I gave the matter no further thought.

WHEN the baby was brought in for her first feeding, my troubles began. She couldn't nurse easily at one breast. I was too weak to maneuver her and too clumsy to help her much. By the end of each feeding I was exhausted and chagrined. Further, my milk supply was scanty, according to the weight records. The nurse remarked one day with devastating casualness, "She isn't getting nearly enough milk from you." Supplementary feedings were begun. Before I left the hospital, my baby was entirely bottle-fed, and I was convinced that I couldn't nurse my baby. More important, because I had made a try which ended with complete failure, the whole experience left me feeling discouraged and somehow inadequate.

If my second child had been born soon after my first, I should not have even tried to nurse him. What possible reason could there be for repeating an experience so unprofitable and disappointing to us both? It is a common argument, born of an all-too-common combination of circumstances.

As it happened, several years went by before the birth of my second child—years during which I was studying recent work on emotion and the

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Marriage is a Private Affair

Could they keep their love? Could they keep their marriage? For the first time Phoebe was frightened, as she listened to her friend say: "I don't love him any more. And marriage is so horrible without love. Something happened to us; I don't know what!" *Is it possible for this to happen to Tom and me? Phoebe wondered. Oh, no, it can't! We're so much in love. But so were Mickey and Bill—four years ago. Is there a way to make marriage happy, to keep love new? Marriage is a Private Affair, a new serial by Judith Kelly, starts in the March JOURNAL.*

"Got a good day for the journey," said Tom, splashing water all over everything.

"Lovely day," said Emily.

"You know," he said, "I wouldn't wonder if I could sell off most of the garden stuff. Might as well. I mean—just the two of us, we can't eat wheelbarrowloads of squash and tomatoes and things. I was just looking—the crab tree is loaded again. Going to ripen early too."

"Is it?"

Tom said, "It'll take us all winter just to eat up what's left over down there in the fruit cellar." He wiped his hands. "You can see how foolish it would have been if you'd gone on canning this season. No reason for it."

"No," said Emily, "no reason."

TOM was a big man, and everything about him was kind and steady. He was all brown—hands, face, dark-brown eyes and red-brown hair. His shirt was open and the throat was strong and brown, too—nothing scrawny and middle-aged about it.

"I'll just wipe off the car seat," said Tom. "You have Sandra give me a yell when the junk is ready to load." His voice was fearfully hearty, but he wasn't looking at her.

"All right," said Emily.

She went upstairs then, down the long hall. They had added rooms as the children were born and Tom made money, so the house had no longer any special shape; it reminded Emily of a squirrel with its cheeks full of nuts. It bulged: room over the porch, that was Jimmy and Ralph; room over the back porch, that was Edward. And then, when they thought they were through, room over the garage for Sandra.

Jimmy was married and had a baby of his own. He was in an architect's firm in Onega, Illinois, and he never got back any more because of the baby and his work and the distance to the East.

Ralph was even farther, in Hollywood, doing something about the mechanics of lighting for color movies.

Edward was in a place called Taos, painting some more of those pictures.

"I can't see why Edward couldn't have turned out to be useful," said Tom.

"He's only twenty-one," Emily reminded him.

Emily stopped in her room to look at her eyes in the old walnut mirror. They were red. Her nose was red too. A disgrace. She reached for the powder. The mirror was edged with snapshots of the family. Tom with the big fish. Jimmy with a football trophy, Ralph in his first Tux, Edward in a green smock. Sandra in her baby carriage, Sandra in her kiddie pen, Sandra in a blue fuzzy play suit, Sandra in her graduating dress.

Emily's face in the mirror looked pale after it was freshly powdered. She thought, *I certainly look all my years now.* Keeping up with the children had kept her young, but this summer, somehow, she had gotten tired all at once.

She went to Sandra's room. "You about ready to go now?" she asked.

"Mumsie, I can't find my other pair of saddle shoes." Sandra sat back on her heels and pushed her hair from her eyes. "I've even crawled in under the rafters. They're gone, they're simply gone."

"Oh, those," said Emily. "I took them down and cleaned them. They're in the kitchen window in the sun."

"Mumsie—you didn't!" Sandra sounded horrified. "Oh—you know I never clean them!"

"That's how they look." Emily sat down on the ruffled bed. "But you can't take them that way to college."

Sandra wrung her hands. "Nobody anywhere," she said dramatically, "ever is seen in saddle shoes that aren't dirty. It simply isn't done, mumsie. The girls at college would think I was—I was peculiar."

Emily said, "Well, you wear them a half hour and they'll be right back where they were. It's not serious."

Sandra slipped out of her linen dress. Her slim young body looked childish in the pink slip, and her bright hair fell down her neck, and the warm summer light lay softly on the curve of her cheeks. When she pulled on her traveling dress, she looked older, more assured.

"I'll get them now," she said in her quick young voice, "and tell dad I'm ready." She ran lightly down the hall.

Emily went over and picked up the pajamas on top of the open suitcase. When Sandra was out late for dances, Emily always laid them out and turned the bed down. She picked them up now, and folded them carefully. She made a neat little bow of the sash. She laid them back in the suitcase, and smoothed the silk, and tucked a sheet of tissue paper over the top.

"Mumsie, they are so clean!" Sandra jammed the shoes in on top of the tissue, and snapped the case. Her eyes were bright and her cheeks flushed.

TOM came in, very big in the little room, and he made a great bustle over the suitcase, and the hatbox, so shiny and new, and the dressing case. Sandra caught up her little tweed jacket and Emily took the tennis racket in its fabric case. Tom and Sandra went ahead and Emily followed. Emily wasn't going to the train. She said it was because the man was coming to fix the icebox.

The back of the car was filled with two large cartons tied with heavy twine. Sandra stopped when she saw them and said, "Mumsie, what in the world is in these?"

Emily said, "I just packed up a few jellies and jams and—and pickles—and a jar of chicken. I just thought you'll get hungry, maybe, for home-canned things."

Sandra said, "But mother, I can't take those big cartons on the train. I simply can't. How'll I look? It was sweet of you, mother, but I can't take them." She made a little gesture. "I wouldn't be able to get them in my room either."

Tom said, "I expect that's right, Sandra. You'll have to take potluck with the

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are supposed to read between the lines.

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permitting this amputation before he had read these documents. Nothing was the same. Lister believed in rigid antiseptics and Walker had used none. Lister believed in boiling his instruments and Walker had sharpened his knife upon his shoe.

Eventually it filtered through to Doctor Walker's brain that his patient was condemning him—not for sins of commission, but for sins of omission. He turned from the bed to prepare another dose of morphine, but Mr. Peabody stopped him. "He will die without further attention," he said caustically, and the enraged surgeon did not answer. Instead he picked up his bag and left the room. No effort was made to stop him, so completely now were both the old banker and the old merchant convinced that it was his methods which had destroyed their young friend.

The medical student remained by the bed, and it was he who raised Major Beverly's head when the man said, "Lift me. Lift me, quickly. I must tell them!" Then to the Quaker and the Quakeress and to the man who had refused a baronetcy, the dying officer said:

"Lister has a mild and magnificent eye, Quaker sobriety, severe ideals. He is a Puritan transposed into a softer and more grateful key. He will be the savior of surgery. If a Quaker across the world has found a way to stop this kind of death, then a Quaker on this side of the world should provide a place in which to stop it."

"I will, Beverly," Johns Hopkins said. "I promise you, I will."

Those were the last words the major ever heard, except from his own lips, for as the medical student put him back upon the pillows he said, "Wear my second-day dress to-night, darling."

The Quakeress buried her face in her apron, but the two elderly gentlemen who stood at the foot of the bed watched him die with a smile upon his lips. *He could take the burdens off us, they thought. We could trust him. He could walk with ease among men of all ranks everywhere. He could bring into a room strength and quiet joy. He could make us proud of him as only fathers feel pride.*

No, it could not be. It could not be that so much vivid warmth, so much happy promise could be taken from the world—and yet, it was. All their money, power and combined strength had not been sufficient to save this life which both they and young Susie Slagle loved, in Baltimore. But in Edinburgh, under Doctor Lister's care—

Mr. Hopkins thought of the miles and miles of red-brick houses, of the hundreds of families living in them, and of gentle, brave little Susie Slagle. "Mr. Peabody," he said, "you were right. Money is only valuable when it works; and the highest interest it can ever bring is in saving human life and dispensing knowledge. I shall leave my fortune to found a university and a teaching hospital."

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growth of personality. I gradually became convinced that mothers and their children both miss an important, almost vital satisfaction when they miss the experience of nursing. And I resolved that when I had another baby, I would try again, and not admit defeat so readily. Knowing from experience that bottle-feeding can be difficult, too, I was immune to the argument that it is just as good for the baby and far less trouble than nursing.

The crucial step in my new course was this resolution—backed, as it was, not by grim determination but by a genuine, hopeful desire. But I did do a number of things to insure its success. The first was to enlist the help of my doctor from the very beginning of pregnancy. When he found I was anxious to nurse my baby, he prescribed simple treatments for my nipples. Then I made sure that my family knew my plans and reasons and were ready to accept the regimen imposed upon a household by a nursing mother. (It doesn't help your self-confidence when grandmother chides you for being "old-fashioned," or when your husband chafes at the restricted life you must lead for a while.)

I steeled myself, too, against the attitude of the hospital nurses, most of whom are impressed with the physical success of bottle-feeding and are therefore not disposed to urge nursing on a mother whose confidence is faltering. Indeed, I suspect that a very large number of mothers give up trying to breast-feed their babies because of the well-meant but thoughtless comments about nursing which are made by hospital nurses during the first difficult days after the baby's birth.

A new mother is peculiarly sensitive to the nurses' attitude. I remember still with a sense of pain the nurse who said dryly as she helped me struggle with my howling, hungry first-born, "In fifty years there won't be such a thing as a breast-fed baby." And I remember, too, the sense of triumph I felt when I could and did turn a deaf ear to the nurse who said, half reprovingly, of

my second-born, "He only got two ounces from you at the last feeding!" She was fretting because the charts said he should be getting four ounces at a feeding. But I knew he was gaining and I didn't care what the charts said.

And finally I prepared mentally for those first few post-hospital days when one seems to be all thumbs—and very weak thumbs at that. This is most important, I think. It is one thing to nurse your baby in the hospital when he is handed to you, clean and rosy, every three or four hours. It is something else when you arrive home and have to add five nursing periods to the new, unfamiliar and exhausting routine of the baby's day.

But I quickly found that the nursing periods, instead of being another task, gave me a chance to relax, get acquainted with my son and really enjoy him. Instead of being suddenly two separate beings, we still belonged very much to each other, and we quickly established a rapport, out of which came his first fugitive smiles, and later his confident, happy little laughs.

The outcome of all this planning was unqualified success. The baby not only grew well but obviously enjoyed his feedings enormously. I enjoyed his ravenous hunger and his sleepy, half-smiling satisfaction, and I liked being with him, sure that we wouldn't be interrupted or worried over whether the bottle was the right temperature, the formula made up right, the nipple sterile, and so on. With this intimate contact, I came to know him more quickly as an individual; and as he grew old enough to have likes and dislikes of his own, I felt more confidence in helping him. This understanding, and my feeling of adequacy in being able so simply to satisfy the first needs of my small son, have lasted long beyond the few months of nursing. The price of being at home at fixed times every day, and of leading a more regular and somewhat less active life than usual, was indeed no price at all, but a rich and profitable interlude, physically, emotionally and intellectually.