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Nathan Gendelman

A Healthy Mother and a Healthy Baby

The interview with Nathan Gendelman, the head of the Rehabilitation Clinic *Health in Motion*, published October 13, 2006, aroused much interest among readers. That was not surprising: everybody wants to be healthy, but not everyone knows how to achieve health.

Nathan Gendelman, a Doctor of Osteopathy in manual practice, emphasizes that his prevention and treatment methods are not revolutionary. They are based on the experience of previous generations, the natural laws of life, and logic.

Today's article is dedicated to human birth or rather the birth of a healthy person.

Is there a parent who does not wish his child to be born healthy and have a happy life? However, not everyone realizes that human life begins even before a woman becomes pregnant. One should understand a simple truth: a baby's health depends on mother's health.

While preparing for pregnancy it is necessary to give up alcohol and smoking and to reconsider one's diet. It is important to know that what a woman eats goes to feed her child. During pregnancy it will be necessary not to consume white sugar, carbonated drinks, all kinds of cola and wheat bread. This is not a big sacrifice to make but, believe me, it is worth doing. Mother's diet should include food that ensures a baby's growth and strong bones. Dr. D. Jarvis, a well known American doctor, was of the opinion that apple cider vinegar may be of great benefit due to its high content of calcium – a mainstay of bone health.

His recipe is very simple but it may have a positive effect on the development of a child: a teaspoon of apple cider vinegar in a glass of water before each meal with two teaspoons of natural honey added.

Honey deserves a special mention. It is not called a storehouse of vitamins for nothing: it strengthens body's immunity, increases vitality, and has a beneficial effect on the digestive organs. It is known that natural honey, and I mean natural honey, preferably coming straight from an apiary, has a potent antimicrobial effect.

Another piece of advice from Dr. Jarvis: one softly-boiled egg a day. The egg became a symbol of emerging life also because it is a good source of practically all minerals, including iron (the most important component of the diet of a mother-to-be), phosphorus that is necessary for strong teeth and bones, iodine for the production of thyroid hormones, etc. Should I mention that organic eggs from a farm are a perfect answer?

Proper diet during pregnancy includes lots of vegetables, fruits, nuts (a must!) as well as seafood – in balanced proportions. Another must – spend more time in the fresh air. Besides, one should remember that each pill taken by a mother-to-be finds its way into the baby's body. Medication may be taken only if utter necessity compels it – there are many options that allow one to avoid chemical drugs that are doubly dangerous during pregnancy.

It is extremely important to maintain the serenity of mind during pregnancy. All stresses experienced by a woman may harm her baby even more than herself. Stress affecting the emerging nervous system may “program” a baby for problems later in life.

Towards the end of the pregnancy some women suffer from back pain. It is understandable: the growing foetus needs more space. Mother's own weight gain contributes to increased spinal load and may lead to spinal hyper-extension. I would not recommend electric treatment for this problem or trying to correct it by applying force. Any incautious touch may cause premature childbirth. Osteopathy uses sparing methods that do not involve overcoming pain.

Finally it is time for childbirth. Of course, ideally this millenniums old process should proceed without the intervention of technological and other means of modern medicine. It's easier to give advice than to give birth but epidural anaesthesia is better avoided. A needle, even one inserted in the most careful manner, causes a microtrauma the consequences of which are not easily predictable. The course of labour affects the further life of a person. An osteopath may alleviate or even eliminate negative effects if, for instance, a vacuum extractor was used, but every missed day reduces the chances of success.

Osteopaths say that an abnormality may be eliminated in three minutes immediately after childbirth; if treatment is started three days after childbirth it may take three months; after one month treatment may take more than three years. Young mothers typically complain about their babies crying for no reason, refusing to nurse, awakening frequently at night. However, this happens for a reason!

Pediatricians (I do not want to belittle them, it's just that their functions are somewhat different) may miss some birth traumas and leave them without attention, sometimes for years. As a result, locomotor problems, abnormalities of the internal organs or even mental disorders develop “out-of-the-blue”.

The absence of the sucking reflex, colic, inability to hold the head erect – all this has to be dealt with by an osteopath and specialists working with him. Sometimes positive changes are noted in a baby after one or two sessions.

Let me give you an example. A healthy baby grasps a nipple or a teat firmly. Such baby does not swallow air together with milk – swallowed air often causes possetting in “problem” children. In most cases this is the result of a minor birth trauma – the asymmetry of the cranial bones. An osteopath gently repositions the cranial bones thus relieving baby's discomfort and parents' anxiety. In other words, treatment is aimed at the original cause, not the consequences.

We teach young mothers to watch their babies carefully and be aware of the stages of their natural development so that they can seek help in time if something goes wrong.

In particular, it should be remembered that in the mother's womb a baby stays mostly in the so-called embryo posture. This posture is familiar and comfortable for a baby and he or she tries to keep it after "getting out". A baby must straighten its spine gradually – that's why babies were swaddled tightly at one time. At this time of his life when a baby is awake he can be safely placed on his stomach. This strengthens baby's muscles.

Every stage of human development is a consequence of the previous stage. Each stage has an inherent meaning. It is not possible to skip the steps of the ladder of life. For instance, a baby won't be able to sit up if he does not learn to turn on his own thus training the trunk muscles. Parents who wish to speed up the process by propping a baby with pillows, make a mistake.

A baby must discover the world on his own, he is intrinsically able to feel when he is ready to proceed to the next stage of development.

Pay attention to how a baby is crawling: natural intuition makes him to keep his "unused" heels up. A baby stands on his heels only when his nervous system is prepared for spatial orientation.

Adults are not supposed to speed up events – they should facilitate the natural process of development. Massage plays an important role in this, and we teach massage techniques to young mothers. They should be able not only to perform movements correctly but also understand the purpose of each movement. Massage is great for the prevention of numerous diseases that may develop in early childhood. Massage helps to develop the sucking reflex, to relieve colic, and to correct the head tilt (torticollis) and the consequences of infantile cerebral paralysis.

Besides, the gentle touch of a parent's hands fills a baby with joy and is very good for his nervous system. Even simple rubbing and stroking gives a baby a lot of pleasure and the feeling of physical closeness to another person. Peacefulness and security are especially important at this age, and those parents who believe in some mythical educational principles and do not hurry to pick up and hold the baby are doing the wrong thing absolutely. Nature provides excellent examples of parental attitude – think of films about animals and watch baby animals seeking and finding parental warmth.

Scientific studies prove that it is not just about pleasure. People who grew up in a nurturing environment feel confident later in life and, as a rule, are very successful.

It does not mean, however, that a child should be humoured in every way and his wishes should be anticipated. Do not hurry to hand him an attractive toy – he should learn to get an out-of-reach toy himself. It is not a good idea to hold a child's hands up and pretend that he walks: if a child gets used to such practice he may be unwilling to stand up by himself when it is time for him to walk.

A breast-feeding mother should keep to her usual diet (except for garlic and onions). I'd like to say again: a baby eats what his mother eats only a baby gets food through mother's milk. Mother's milk contains everything a baby needs for his vital functions and until the age of 5 or 6 months he will not be "food-disadvantaged".

When clients ask whether a baby should be given soft porridge, I answer: Why hurry if nature hasn't given him teeth to chew it with? On the other hand, teeth appear when a baby's stomach is ready to digest food that is more rough than mother's milk.

This is one of the fundamental principles of osteopathy: the human body is an integrated system and a child should receive integrated medical care. Quite often a child is "managed" by two specialists at once – an osteopath and a physiotherapist. Working together with medically literate parents we can free a child from childbirth-related problems and ensure that he grows up healthy and enjoys life.

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