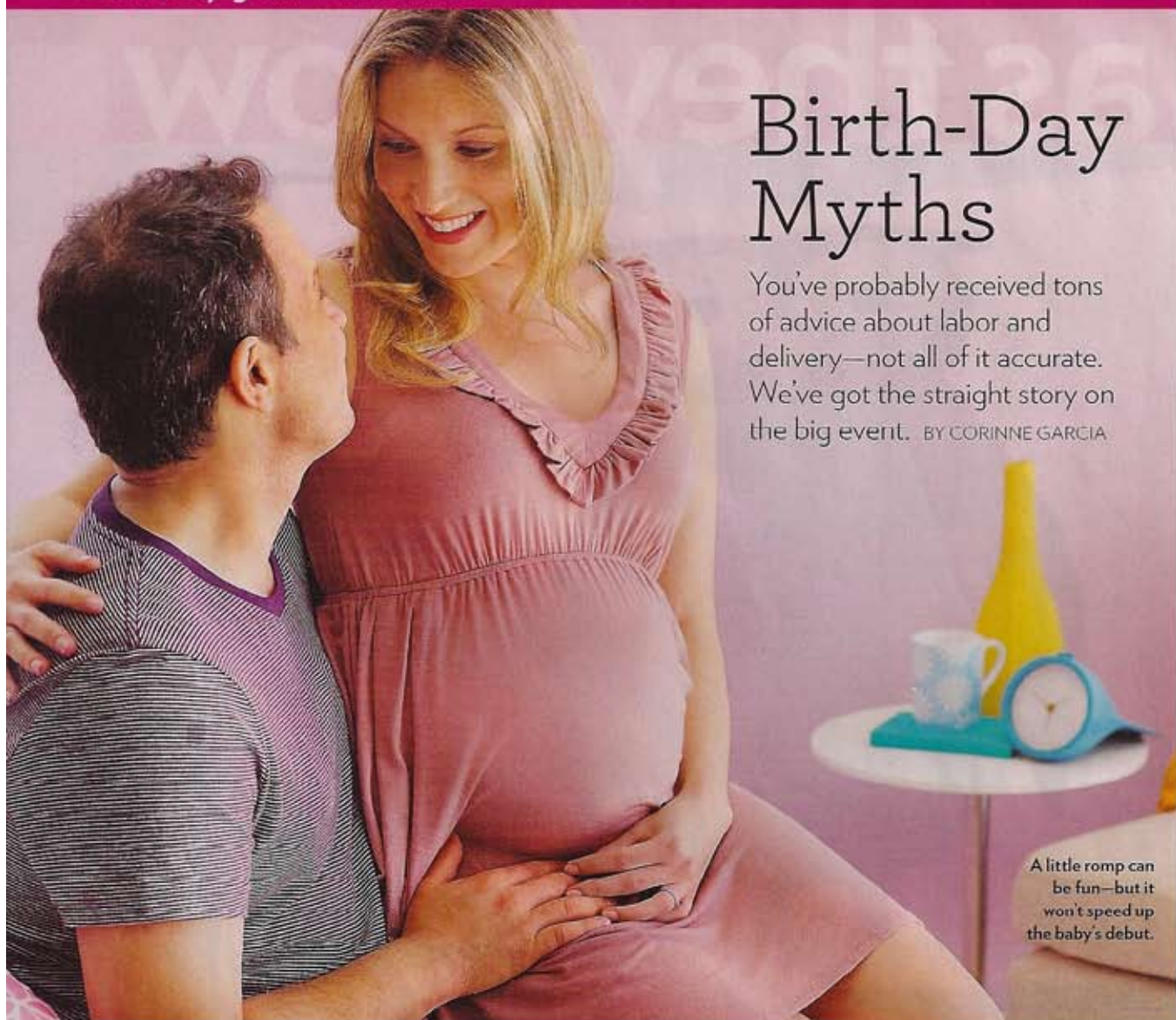


Birth-Day Myths

You've probably received tons of advice about labor and delivery—not all of it accurate. We've got the straight story on the big event. BY CORINNE GARCIA



A little romp can be fun—but it won't speed up the baby's debut.

There are few times in a woman's life when you're given as much advice as you receive during your pregnancy. Suddenly, just about everyone wants to share their wisdom: friends, family, doctors—even complete strangers. Unfortunately, not all of the information that's out there is true or trustworthy, especially when it comes to labor and birth. We checked in with the experts to dispel some of the most common misconceptions.

THE MYTH

Your water will always break before you go into labor.

THE REALITY In movies and on TV, labor usually begins with a dramatic splash, but in the real world this happens to only about 10 percent of women. "It's more common to go into labor starting with

contractions, and your water may not break until right before you give birth," says Laura Dean, M.D., an ob-gyn with the Stillwater Medical Group, in Stillwater, Minnesota.

Even if your water *does* break first, it doesn't necessarily mean that labor will start right away (though you should call your doctor immediately because she'll likely want you to come in for monitoring), according to Judith Tinkelenberg, a nurse-midwife and director of the Community Childbearing Institute Birth Center, in San Francisco. "Eighty-five percent of women go into active labor within 24 hours of their water breaking. But the remaining 15 percent of women could

You may have heard that **semen contains a hormone often used to induce labor**. But having sex probably won't speed things up.

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as they grow PREGNANCY

take as long as four or five days if they aren't induced," she explains. However, because there's a higher risk of infection after your water has broken, most doctors will induce labor after 24 hours have passed.

THE MYTH

You can trigger labor by having intercourse.

THE REALITY You may have heard that semen contains prostaglandin, a hormone often used by doctors to help induce labor—but semen doesn't actually contain enough to do anything significant. "While it can't hurt, it probably won't bring on labor," Tinkelenberg says. Similarly, you might have been told that having an orgasm can also get things moving along, but it's only likely to bring on a false contraction (a feeling that happens when the abdominal muscles spasm). The bottom line: As long as your doctor gives you the okay, feel free to get frisky with your partner; just don't expect that it will help you to meet your little one any sooner.

THE MYTH

When your cervix is dilated, you'll go into labor soon.

THE REALITY Don't tell your husband to start passing out the cigars just yet: "The cervix can both dilate and efface weeks before labor actually starts," notes Dr. Dean. While your ob-gyn will likely check your cervix each week toward the end of your pregnancy, it's not necessarily because it's a labor indicator. "A baseline cervix check is helpful for a doctor to have as a comparison when a patient is admitted in labor," Dr. Dean explains. Moreover, some women actually go into labor before they begin to dilate at all—so don't assume that you're still ages from game time if your ob-gyn reports that you're not dilated.

THE MYTH

If you're induced, you'll go into labor immediately.

THE REALITY By the end of your pregnancy it's hard not to dream about having an induction—especially if you've already gone past your due date. Getting one, however, doesn't necessarily mean you'll be holding your sweet baby in your arms right away. Some patients who need to be induced may already show cervical changes, like dilation and thinning of the cervix; they typically respond better and more quickly to the procedure. Still others will have a stepwise approach, including cervical ripening with a gel or a Foley bulb, followed by Pitocin, all of which can take some time, explains Dr. Dean. And once you do go into labor after being induced, it may actually take longer and be more painful than spontaneous labor, since your body may not be fully prepared for it and because Pitocin makes contractions stronger.

THE MYTH

Your doctor will be present throughout labor.

THE REALITY Think of your doctor's presence as a check-in, not a sit-in. She could be looking in on other patients or attending other births while you're in labor—or she might not even arrive at the hospital until you're close to being fully dilated. (It's a good idea to ask about the typical scenario ahead of time so you're on the same page about what is likely to happen.) No matter what, don't worry that you'll find yourself without support at any point, Tinkelenberg reassures: Labor and delivery nurses will be on hand throughout the entire process, and they're trained to closely monitor you and your progress—as well as to update your doctor regularly either by phone or during her check-ins.

THE MYTH

Once the baby is in your arms, delivery is over.

THE REALITY You've given birth, so now you can rest, right? Not so fast. It ain't over 'til the placenta passes. Fortunately, compared with birthing a child, delivering the placenta is relatively painless—although you may have to push a little to help get it out. You probably won't have long to wait; the average time to deliver the placenta is about 30 minutes, according to Dr. Dean.

THE MYTH

Your milk will come in right after your little one is born.

THE REALITY On average, a mother's milk doesn't come in until three days after birth, but don't worry—your infant won't have to go hungry in the meantime. For the first few days after the baby arrives, your breasts will fill with colostrum, a nutrient-rich fluid. To help you fully understand the breastfeeding process, Dr. Dean recommends that you attend a breastfeeding class at some point during your pregnancy. "Getting educated ahead of time can keep you from feeling discouraged," she says—as well as increase your odds of being able to enjoy this special way of nourishing your child. □

Q & A

I'm seven months along and though I'm excited to be a mom, I'm embarrassed to

admit I'm sick of being pregnant. Is there something wrong with me?

Not in the slightest. By the last trimester, most moms-to-be are ready for it to be over. "Pregnant women are expected to feel good and be happy, but it's hard when you're not sleeping well, you have to pee all the time, you feel puffy, and you have no energy because your body is using it to build a baby," says Michele Isaacs Glikzman, M.D., author of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Pregnancy and Childbirth*. Her advice? Focus on the positive. You'll soon be able to wear normal clothes, paint your own toenails (or at least see them again), and get a decent night's rest... well, maybe you'll have to forgo that last one for a few more months. But of course you'll have a beautiful newborn to make it all worthwhile.

It's the Tiny Things that Make All the Difference

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