



Ina May's Guide to Breastfeeding

Ina May Gaskin

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Everything you need to know to make breastfeeding a joyful, natural, and richly fulfilling experience for both you and your baby

Drawing on her decades of experience in caring for pregnant women, mothers, and babies, Ina May Gaskin explores the health and psychological benefits of breastfeeding and gives you invaluable practical advice that will help you nurse your baby in the most fulfilling way possible. Inside you'll find answers to virtually every question you have on breastfeeding, including topics such as

- the benefits of breastfeeding
- nursing challenges
- pumps and other nursing products
- sleeping arrangements
- nursing and work
- medications
- nursing multiples
- weaning
- sick babies
- nipplephobia, and much more

Ina May's Guide to Breastfeeding is filled with helpful advice, medical facts, and real-life stories that will help you understand how and why breastfeeding works and how you can use it to more deeply connect with your baby and your own body. Whether you're planning to nurse for the first time or are looking for the latest, most up-to-date expert advice available, you couldn't hope to find a better guide than Ina May.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

Ina May's Guide to Breastfeeding Details

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From Reader Review Ina May's Guide to Breastfeeding for online ebook

Ashley says

I wish I had skipped all the other baby books and just read Ina May's Guides to Childbirth and Breastfeeding. These are the most thorough, well-written books on the subject by someone who clearly has the experience to help you with any possible challenge. The only downside to Ina May's books is that they will make you a know-it-all on the subjects in them, and I know nobody wants to sit around and listen to me prattle on about breastfeeding all day now that I feel like such an expert :)

Danielle says

Helped me feel more confident about breastfeeding and gave me some good ideas to trouble shoot in post partum. Some may find it "preachy" but I thought it was quite empowering.

Alice says

A book about breastfeeding. Helpful, but does have a lot of pro-breastfeeding propaganda that seems like a waste of space as I seriously doubt anyone reading anything written by Ina May Gaskin has doubts about the benefits of breastfeeding.

Jasmin says

This was such an excellent book! I highly recommend it to any pregnant woman (even if they aren't really considering breastfeeding), any new mother struggling with breastfeeding, and to anyone who is generally interested in breastfeeding or the incredible abilities of the female body (husbands, doulas, doctors, midwives, and everyone else).

As an expecting mother, I was excited to see this book at the bookstore after I had just finished reading Ina May's guide to childbirth. I love Ina May's writing style and her philosophies regarding pregnancy, birth and motherhood, and I knew she would be a great tool in learning about breastfeeding. I did not know much about breastfeeding before I read this book, just that it is good for your baby but that a lot of people have trouble with it. I feel much more confident about my decision to breastfeed now. Ina May covers a vast amount of material in this book ranging from how breastfeeding works, how to prepare for nursing while you are still pregnant, how to breastfeed, problems you might encounter and how to deal with them, and a discussion about breastfeeding culture.

There were many things I found interesting reading through this book and I would like to share just a couple things. First, I always hear that breastfeeding is painful and difficult. But Ina May talks about how pain comes from having a poor latch (which can lead to other problems) and discusses how to get a proper latch or how to find someone who can help you get a better latch. She said that nursing should be a wonderful feeling and experience, and that it is important to get it right at the beginning to have a good breastfeeding experience.

Second, I was really saddened by how breastfeeding is viewed in America. While it is a completely natural and wonderful thing for a mother to do for her babies (and what every other mammal does) so many women feel uncomfortable and/or are harassed while breastfeeding. Our culture associates breasts and nipples with sex to the point that it makes people uncomfortable to see breasts being used for what they are actually intended to be used for. I am only 6 months pregnant right now, and even before reading this book I have been nervous about how comfortable I will feel about breastfeeding my baby. I am scared to be exposed around my friends and family, even though I know I shouldn't be. This book really helped open my eyes to the huge dilemma we have in our culture (she terms it "nipplephobia") and it both saddened and inspired me. I believe that the more people who read this book, or learn about breastfeeding, the more comfortable people will become with the idea of it, and the better off we will all be.

Katherine says

This is a bit lighter on specific practicalities but still has a good deal of information. I liked the nurturing and encouraging tone very much--the introduction ends with a "note on etiquette" that admonishes against being judgmental of those who don't breastfeeding: "How would it make you feel for someone to make comments about a way of feeding what you have no way to reverse? It is possible to educate without issuing statements that make people feel criticized." <333 The chapter on weaning is also more moderate and supportive of what's best for the baby and the mother both.

Other interesting parts: interweaving of personal stories around breastfeeding and various challenges, stories from The Farm (basically the hippie commune/midwife community Ina May founded), and anthropological/historical info about wet nursing and nursing adopted babies or nursing of grandchildren by grandmothers or teenagers who haven't been pregnant themselves before.

The essay on "nipplephobia" in the U.S. makes some good points about how it's odd to only have breasts/nipples be sexual objects and not the perhaps more important biological function of feeding the next generations and all. It concludes by encouraging women to feel more comfortable breastfeeding in public as the main thing that can be done to shift the culture, which seems sensible and realistic.

Elana Gravitz says

highly recommended to anyone who is breastfeeding, thinking of breastfeeding, or wants to know why there are people who think breastfeeding is a big deal. also recommended to people like me who are curious about

why Ina May G. is considered a big deal. now i get it. Ina May rocks.

Update - Ina May is coming to speak at the U of M later this month! She has a new book called Birth Matters. Hooray!

Tina Wickenden says

Great info for first time mom's who want to breastfeed!

Green Iona says

This book really taught me a lot-not just about breastfeeding but about childbirth. I think this is the first book that I read about breastfeeding and about childbirth. Before reading this book I was up in the air about having a childbirth or using an epidural. I had a few friends who really enjoyed their epidural, but this book convinced me that the less interventions you can use-the better...every natural process in birth has a purpose. I feel like I'm a step ahead of a lot of mothers for as far as breastfeeding goes because of what I've learned in this book.

Meredith says

Ina May's Birkenstocks are definitely showing in this book, and there is a crunchy granola, alternative medicine slant to all the advice. Her breastfeeding guide gives the same basic information as most other breastfeeding books but from a naturopathic hippie perspective. If you're not really left-leaning, you may want to read *The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding*, *Breastfeeding Made Simple: Seven Natural Laws for Nursing Mothers*, and/or *The Nursing Mother's Companion* instead.

One of the things this book does that other breastfeeding books don't do is actually devote an entire chapter (chapter 3) to discussing all the birth practices that adversely affect breastfeeding. Oddly enough, some of the most common obstacles to breastfeeding are iatrogenic. This may be why they are rarely addressed by healthcare providers. As part of informed consent a woman should be told which practices decrease her odds of being able to successfully breastfeed, not to discourage her from having an induction or receiving an epidural but to prepare her for the consequences if she has her heart set on breastfeeding. If a woman has breastfeeding as one of her top priorities, she has a right to know what practices will help or hinder her. She may change her birth plan or simply adjust her expectations.

I wish that Ina May would have included in this chapter the common factors in a woman's medical history, such as an eating disorder, current anti-depressant use, and sexual assault, that also negatively affect the likelihood of being able to successfully breastfeed. So many women are blindsided by their inability to breastfeed because they had no idea that they were facing what was likely insurmountable odds. Better prenatal education and screening can prevent this by providing a mother with a realistic grasp on her own particular situation.

Another great thing about *Ina May's Guide to Breastfeeding* is that it touches upon the crucial point that breastfeeding isn't easy just because it is natural. "Because of the invisibility of nursing in our society, many

women believe that nursing a baby should be easy and almost automatic..." (121). Women too often mistakenly believe that breastfeeding should be easy because it is natural, and this misconception that breastfeeding should be "easy" because it is "natural" has in part fueled the enormous backlash against encouraging breastfeeding. Women who struggle with breastfeeding or find themselves unable to breastfeed when they believed it should be easy and automatic often become -- understandably -- frustrated, disappointed, and angry when their unrealistic expectations are crushed.

Only women in societies, or communities, in which they have seen numerous mothers breastfeeding without any covering will find breastfeeding less of a challenge. This is because they have spent their entire lives learning through observation about the different nursing positions, how mothers correct bad latches, and the infant cues that initiate and end breastfeeding sessions.

For the majority of women in Western societies, there is a big learning curve, and breastfeeding *will* be difficult. The circumstances and interventions during a birth, the physical structure of a mother's breasts and nipples, medical treatments given to and procedures performed upon the infant, the infant's health and temperament, and the mother's pre-existing medical conditions can also significantly decrease the odds of being able to successfully breastfeed.

Establishing breastfeeding is rarely easy and is usually challenging for the first couple weeks even for mothers who have previously breastfed other infants. This is one the reasons behind the push for breastfeeding education and support to be offered as part of postnatal care by the medical industry.

Ina May's Guide to Breastfeeding offers a large number of personal stories. Unfortunately, many featured mothers who persevered despite the fact that it made both them and their babies miserable for a significant amount of time. So, I had to deduct a star. This is a terrible practice and should not be encouraged or touted as a success story even if breastfeeding is eventually able to be established. Getting off to a rough start but persevering and ultimately succeeding with the help of good support and professional assistance is one thing. But this veered into the pathological in many cases. In one story, the baby would scream and arch away every time he was offered the breast. It was horrifying. I couldn't understand what was wrong with his mother. She was torturing that child.

While breastmilk may be nutritionally superior to formula, it is detrimental to persist to attempting to breastfeed when it makes either the mother or the child completely miserable. It is also one more stressor on top of disturbed sleep cycles, wildly fluctuating hormones, and an emotional roller coaster, which can be the straw that broke the camel's back that pushes a mother into a clinical mental state. Doing anything that can cause the mother to resent the child can create a dangerous situation and at the very least interferes with the critical bonding time during the first two weeks after birth. It is not worth traumatizing the entire family. If breastfeeding clearly isn't working, then stop. After all, formula was invented to feed babies who couldn't be breastfed or wet-nursed.

It is usually the mother's own self-imposed expectations that cause her to feel like a failure if she desires to breastfeed but cannot, and these examples should have been framed as situations where breastfeeding clearly wasn't working and a backup plan should have been implemented. All breastfeeding advocates need to make sure that women know it is okay if breastfeeding is unsuccessful. This is so very, very important. Women need to know that they didn't "fail" if they wanted to breastfeed but couldn't. Sometimes that's just the way the cookie crumbles. Things don't always work out the way we hoped. It's okay to feel disappointed, but you have to move on. Persisting at all costs is foolish and counterproductive. Don't do it. Don't imitate the bad examples in this book.

The book concludes with a chapter devoted to "nipple phobia" in the United States. While it is an interesting discussion, I'm surprised that Ina May never made the connection between the belief that breastfeeding is unacceptable in public and abstinence-only sex education, the U.S. government's de facto position that sex is only permissible within the confines of marriage and only then if both participants can afford to pay for any resulting children 100% out of pocket, and the tradition of the Abrahamic religions that a woman's body is a

sexual object that should only be seen by husband -- not to mention the sects that believe sex done for any purpose outside of reproduction is a terrible sin even for married people. This toxic combination is responsible for much of the attitude that breastfeeding is something that should only be done in secret behind closed doors.

James says

Read the relevant chapters for me as a father.

Katelyn Brown says

Great reference for the months to come

Inder says

This was released on a Monday, I received it on Friday (Amazon pre-order), and I finished it Sunday. As a how-to manual, it's not my favorite (my favorite is *Nursing Mother's Companion*, but I love love love the anthropological background and all of the discussion of shared nursing arrangements, relactating, our society's "nipplephobia," etc. Good stuff.

Also, Ina May is refreshingly moderate about breastfeeding and weaning - unlike Dr. Sears and others, she resists slavish devotion to the attachment parenting model, instead deferring to the mother's feelings and common sense. I love Ina May!

Tara says

I think as parents or parents-to-be, we look for sources of information that resonate with the natural instincts or attitudes we already have, and for me, this book did not. While some of the practical information regarding positions and common problems was informative, much of what she had to say about co-sleeping, baring all in public, shared/wet nursing, delayed cord-clamping, natural childbirth, weaning, etc. just did not agree with my natural instincts as a mom-to-be. Not to mention the constant suggestions to look to the animal kingdom for breastfeeding and parenting cues. There were a handful of other concepts that I just don't see myself following, such as mixing teas with thistle root and applying poultices of parsley for ailments, or when she said there is not reason to have a pump unless you are returning to work. Having date nights with my husband through our child-rearing years is extremely important to us, so I'm planning on pumping for when we have babysitters, although I still feel unsure of how to manage occasional pumping with regular feedings. If you are someone interested in unadulterated, primal, natural childbirth, breastfeeding, and child-rearing, you will probably enjoy this book, but as I said, it's just not my style.

Michelle says

What a great read for advice on breast-feeding, as well as some really interesting views on breast-feeding in our nipplephobic (!! society. This was interesting even if you're not breast-feeding!

Amanda Hookham says

Discusses many things about breastfeeding including our cultures views (which you may or may not agree about), how birth interventions affect breastfeeding, other issues feeding, how to feed, etc etc. so informative! Can't recommend highly enough for first time moms planning to breastfeed and the social commentary can be skipped if you don't agree though I always think opposing opinions are worth a bit of a listen!
