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The Yummy Mummy's Survival Guide

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Extract

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PART ONE

Before It All Starts



Prepare, Prepare: What You Should Definitely Do *Before* Getting Pregnant (or what you should have done months ago, but could start now)

Growing a baby is like any other form of DIY: preparation is key. How you react to this first section depends entirely on your current situation (and on your sense of humour). If you are not pregnant yet, and you bought this book because you are somewhat curious about what lies around the next Big Corner, or you hope you might get pregnant *soon*, this is very good news: you still have a few months to play with before the big OFF, and there's plenty of opportunity to lay down some solid foundations.

If your bun is already rising in the oven, and you are merrily cruising down the road to Yummy Mummyhood, then some of what you read may sound a tad gloomy and depressing, and you'll be kicking yourself every paragraph or so. (As maternal luck would have it, one of the manoeuvres pregnant women can still do is kick themselves. Where's the justice?) Please try not to get too cross, and take heart from the fact that much of this preparation is never done by millions of perfectly gorgeous and healthy mothers every year.

For everyone else, like me, here are some things which, if you do

them for about six months before you become pregnant, should reward you with an easier and healthier pregnancy, and will make life after the birth a lot less, errr, wobbly.

1. **Get Fit**

As the perfectly formed people at Nike tell us, ***JUST DO IT***. Even bold, capitals, italics and a forceful-looking font don't convey the importance of this Top Tip. Obviously, if you've never seen a pair of trainers before, then now is not a good time to start marathon running. But, being the self-respecting woman that you are, you probably look after your body well, and are reasonably fit already. This is excellent news, and a great position to start from.

Pregnancy plays the *most* havoc with your **stomach**, so if you can get your abs strong and toned before your pregnancy, you'll carry the baby better and you will get back into shape much more easily. I do speak from experience here: I was least fit before my first baby, and have become fitter and stronger in between each of the others. (Something to do with a growing fear that I've been lucky so far, and everything is about to fall apart and flab out all over the place!) My body coped and recovered much better the stronger my tummy muscles were *before* I started expanding, and it made getting back into some decent clothes much easier. Pain, gain, blah, blah.

Babies get very heavy towards the end, and having **strong legs** helps with the whole 'lugging yourself up flights of stairs' problem. The same goes for your **back**: strong back muscles will make carrying the baby much easier and less painful.

Something else to start toning up is your pelvic floor muscles. Pelvic what? Ha! Now we're really getting somewhere. Another of those 'never heard of them before I was pregnant; will think of them for the rest of my life afterwards' things, your pelvic floor muscles are the ones which allow you to stop weeing halfway through weeing, if you see what I mean. In a nutshell, they are completely trashed when you give birth, and unless you sit at your desk squeezing them in and holding for a count of three while your computer re-boots, you will never get on a trampoline again without incontinence pants.

And Agent Provocateur don't make those, in case you're wondering… Strengthen your pelvic floors now, and you'll be able to jog, jump and sneeze while your best undies stay Martini-dry.

2. **Clean Yourself Out**

If you've ever tried to detox then you'll know what a joyous, exciting time you're in for, but, equally, you will know how beneficial it can be. Your baby is going to grow inside you, and if *you're* clogged up with toxins then your baby will probably clog up pretty soon too, because anything which is in *your* blood will get into your growing baby's blood too. It takes a while to flush all the poisons out of your system, so starting the clean-up well before you become pregnant is a good idea.

- ☆ **Stop smoking.** Yummy Mummies don't smoke.
- ☆ **Cut down on coffee.** Coffee may taste great and be served in rather nice cafés absolutely everywhere, but it's still a strong stimulant, and there has been talk that it doesn't do growing babies much good. This may be why many women feel sick at the very smell of coffee in the early weeks. Clever old biology. The same goes for tea, if you can bear to give that up as well, but as with all things, use your head: the odd cup is almost certainly fine, especially if it cheers you up.
- ☆ **Drink less alcohol.** (Unless you drink tons, in which case, drink a lot less.) Pickled babies are not cool or Yummy at all.
- ☆ **Drugs.** Don't really need to say it, do I? You're intelligent – you work it out.
- ☆ **Don't panic if you haven't done any of this**, and you are several months down the line already: you are almost certainly in the majority, but starting now is better than not bothering at all.

3. **Become a Health Freak**

Your growing baby is entirely selfish, and will have no concern for your wellbeing at all. It will drain all the goodness out of your

body, leaving you with the dregs, the cheeky young thing. Because pregnancy puts such a huge strain on your body, the healthier you are before you start, the better you will feel, the better your chances of having a healthy, strong baby, and the more quickly you'll recover afterwards. And it's after the baby is born that you need more reserves and stamina than ever… So, eat tons of fresh fruit and veg, up the iron intake (it makes you less tired), drink lots of water, get plenty of fresh air and all that other healthy stuff you know about already. You won't regret it.

4. **Take Folic Acid**

'Top Scientists' have found very good evidence that taking 400mg of this stuff for the first three months of pregnancy can significantly reduce the risk of your baby developing spina bifida. They now recommend that you get your levels up before you're pregnant, and that you take it throughout your pregnancy. Not a lot to ask really.

5. **Take a Special Multivitamin**

Only take a multivitamin which is specifically designed for pregnancy. Certain vitamins are potentially harmful to the foetus if levels get too high, and the pregnancy multivits have just the right amount of everything. Bless those Top Scientists.

Some Good News

One of the best things about getting pregnant for the first time is that it shocks you into being more healthy almost overnight, and once you've learned some new habits, and have managed to give up the three vodka and tonics and a kebab on the way home from work, you might just hang on to them for the rest of your life. It may feel like a brutal change of diet and lifestyle to start with, but there are great benefits. There's a good reason why pregnant ladies are said to 'glow' halfway through the pregnancy – *anyone* who pays as much careful attention to eating well and avoiding all toxins would glow after a couple of months! See your clean-up act as the

best beauty routine ever, and it might not feel so hard. In fact, for many of you it won't be hard at all, as your new body just doesn't *feel* like ingesting tons of toxins every day. Anyway, you'll be back on the double tall lattes before your baby can say 'Mummy, are you sure you wouldn't rather have an organic peppermint tea?'

Common Concerns of Future Yummy Mummies

This section is for you if you have ever worried about what it might be like to become a **MOTHER** (in other words, if you're just like every woman I've ever met). Oh, how we ladies love to worry! The list of concerns and questions all future Yummy Mummies carry around in their heads is breathtaking, and it makes one fret for the future of the human race: will anything make all you potentially fantastic mothers take the plunge and actually *procreate*? Will any reassuring words overcome your dread of turning into a fat, boring Frumpy Mummy, who fails miserably at every aspect of baby care, and who never sees the inside of a fancy restaurant again?

I seem to spend half of my free time pacifying freaked-out childless friends who are terrified of committing to their perceived life of drudgery, lard and frumpiness. 'Hang on!' I cry. 'Are you saying *I'm* lardy and frumpy? Did *I* know what I was doing before I started? Do I know *now*?' No, no and no.

However, I have learned quite a few things about what it feels like to become a Yummy Mummy, and I'll do my best to ease at least *some* of the stress. Where I fail, watching anything with Paul Bettany in it should relieve any furrowed brows.

Here are some of the most common worries my friends seem to have, and some mildly helpful advice:

I don't feel very maternal – maybe I'll be an awful mother

This is a disaster. You will never be a good mother, and you should book in for a hysterectomy immediately. You probably shouldn't have pets either. Or houseplants.

I'm lying, of course: very few women feel very maternal before they have a baby, and most go on to become fantastic mums. (Many don't

even feel that maternal *after* the birth, but it's not something people like to talk about. I like to talk about it a lot, and so I do in Part Five).

It's not even clear what feeling 'maternal' means, anyway. In a similar way to how much libido a woman has, so women have varying degrees of maternal urges, and there's nothing to say that you should be consumed with the desire to foster every child on the planet before having a baby yourself.

'Feeling Maternal' could mean any, or none, of the following:

- ☆ Realising that babies and children exist.
- ☆ Being able to sit in the same room as a child without feeling annoyed or put off your food.
- ☆ Finding children quite cute.
- ☆ Saying 'Ahhhhhhh' when you watch a nappy advert.
- ☆ Starting to cry at the mere mention that somebody you know, or even somebody you don't know, has had a baby.
- ☆ Buying baby clothes when you haven't even found a prospective father yet (and this is a sure-fire way never to find one, unless you keep it very secret).
- ☆ Genuinely liking the smell of newborn babies, rather than just *saying* you do.
- ☆ Being able to wipe somebody else's child's snotty nose without retching (I still haven't reached this point yet).

Wherever you sit on this scale *before* you have a baby, you will almost certainly sit somewhere else afterwards, and not necessarily at the more maternal end. I didn't feel the overwhelming urge to have babies before I became pregnant for the first time, and I was quite able to pass babies in the street without drooling. In fact, I was barely aware of their *existence* until I was at least five months pregnant, and that was mainly because I was checking out groovy pram models.

Happily, something inside my brain changed the moment I held my first baby, and I have been unable to hear a baby crying or see a child in distress since without being overcome with the compulsion to cheer the poor thing up. It's just Yummy Mummy Nature

doing her bit, and luckily it works for the majority of women. I've also had periods of feeling very un-maternal, for reasons I'm yet to understand, but these pass and I get back to being sickeningly in love with all three of mine very quickly.

Don't worry if you don't think you feel maternal enough: either you will become more maternal when your baby arrives, or you will remain as you are and do a perfectly good job of looking after your baby anyway. Worrying about it now is pointless: you just have to wait and see what happens, and stop telling yourself that you're not kitted out to be a mother. If you've got a heart, a womb, some self-respect and a sense of humour then you're good to go.

I don't want to get fat

This seems to be one of the biggest off-putters for my child-free friends. I can't believe how many pre-pregnant, gorgeous women freak out about this. Why should you get fat? If you're not fat now, and if you care about how you look, and if you don't want to become fat, then why should pregnancy make you fat? It's a bit like saying: 'I really want to go to Antigua this summer, but I'm worried I'll get sunburn.' Pack some sunblock then, stay in the shade and wear a wide-brimmed hat. Bingo – no sunburn!

Seriously, though, worrying about becoming fat during pregnancy is normal, because it happens to quite a lot of previously slim-line ladies. But the news is very good: if you are careful about what you eat, if you continue to exercise and if you don't treat pregnancy as an excuse to eat all the pies, then you will almost certainly not get fat. A little rounder-of-hip perhaps, but not *fat*. (See **You're Eating for *How* Many?** in Part Three.)

What about the rest of my body? Won't it be ruined?

No, it won't. Lots of bits of your body *will* change, not necessarily for the better, but with a lot of effort most of this is perfectly fixable. If you are really worried about what will happen to your lovely body when you become a Yummy Mummy, then here are some honest truths:

- ☆ You *might* get stretch marks, but many large mothers don't, many skinny, childless women (and men!) do, and there are ways of reducing the damage, should you be genetically challenged in this department.
- ☆ Your breasts will first become much bigger, and then much, much smaller and less pert. There's always surgery, or you could, or probably should, just learn to like them that way.
- ☆ You *might* get varicose veins, but rarely after a first pregnancy, and your genetic makeup has more of a role to play than any growing baby does.
- ☆ Your tummy will become more wobbly for a while, but this is absolutely curable with enough crunching and squeezing, if wobbly's not your thing.
- ☆ *But:* You get a child at the end of it all, and no amount of wobble or droop can outweigh the positives of having a baby. Some perspective, please!

What if I mess it all up?

This is a hard one to answer, because I suppose you *might* mess it all up; you *might* be the worst mother ever known; you *might* leave your new baby in a motorway filling station by mistake because you were busy trying to open a packet of M&Ms and got distracted; your marriage *might* fall apart because of the sudden droopiness of your boobs; and your children *might* hate you forever and turn to a life of drugs and crime. You *might* be forced to spend the rest of your life with 'The Terrible Mother Who Messed It All Up' tattooed across your forehead.

Or, you might just surprise yourself and cope very well. That's the thrill of it – you have no idea how it is going to go, things change every minute and you just have to fly by the seat of your still-gorgeous pants and hope for the best. You may have to readjust what your idea of 'the best' is, to fit in with the realities of looking after a baby and keeping your sanity, but you are more than likely to do a fantastic job and not mess anything up at all.

What about my career?

This is a very tricky one, and, depending on what you do for a living, this could be more or less of a real worry for you.

Some types of work just don't allow for Yummy Mummyhood at all, because they require your presence fourteen hours a day, 365 days a year (if, say, you are the Prime Minister), or because there are physical factors to take into consideration, like being an astronaut or something.

Assuming you are neither an astronaut nor the Prime Minister, then **having a baby should *not* mean the end of your career**, and any employer who suggests it does should be hung, drawn and quartered. Or something else which isn't very nice. The only effect that becoming a mother will have on your career is that everything you do will be enormously more difficult and complicated forever: there will be logistical and practical hurdles involving childcare, illness and just getting out of the house on time, and every day will now carry a huge emotional burden.

If you do go back to work, three things will be different:

- ☆ You will have to work harder than everybody else to prove that you are not a waste of company time and money.
- ☆ You will feel guilty because you are not with your baby.
- ☆ Your career progression will probably slow down.

If you can handle all of that, and can accept having to take a step back – or sideways – for a while, then some of the worry will be eased.

The real rub is that you, like most other women these days, have probably decided to think about having a baby at exactly the point in your career when things could really take off. You have worked hard throughout your twenties to reach a certain rung on the career ladder, and the last thing you want to do is jump off the ladder, only to be begrudgingly allowed back on somewhere near the bottom again.

This is fair enough. But a Yummy Mummy knows that having a baby is something important that she wants to do in her life, and she will find a way to make it work for her, somehow.

It all comes down to one question: **which is more important to *you* – furthering your career now, or having a family now?** Only *you* can answer that, and deep down you know the answer already. In this country we can, at last, have a career *and* a young family without drowning in other people's scorn and too bloody right. But this long-overdue progress can't solve the central issue: **you can't do both of them 100% of the time or give them both 100% of your energy and care.** You just have to decide where the balance lies for you.

The only thing which is *not* OK is doing something you are not happy with because you feel pressured, worried or guilty, or because somebody forces you to. You do what you gotta do, and all will be wonderful.

I'm just not that organised!

No you're not, and why should you be? I wasn't, no mum I ever met was always as frighteningly organised as she is now, but by some as-yet-unexplained process you will become highly skilled at getting a hundred times more stuff done in a much more efficient and effective way than you can at the moment. You'll still forget half of what you need to remember, but you *will* become more organised.

Chrissie Rucker, founder of The White Company

Don't worry if you are not a very organised person yet - I was never organised at all, but having a baby changes all of that. You learn very quickly how to keep on top of things, and you develop your own system of doing things which works for you.

Isn't it selfish to be a Yummy Mummy?

No.

Real Yummy Mummies dedicate huge amounts of their time and emotional energy to loving and caring for their children – but always reserve some time to make *themselves* feel special too, which

generally involves bottles of sweet-smelling lotions and gorgeous things to hang in their wardrobes.

Real Yummy Mummies would rather spend time with their children than anything else – but realise that spending *no* time away from them is very unhealthy and can lead to lifeless hair and a deeply wrinkled brow.

If you are simply too selfish to look after your children properly then you are a Rotten Mummy, not a Yummy Mummy, and you don't need a book, just a good telling off.

I'm too embarrassed about people poking around 'down there'

Not much I can say to this one, except 'Oh grow up.' Doctors have seen it all before, and they really don't (or shouldn't) get a kick out of examining your cervix. Your vagina looks like the millions of other vaginas your midwife has already inspected, and there's almost nothing which can embarrass them.

That said, there does seem to be an unfeasible amount of prodding, poking and measuring involved throughout pregnancy, and also well after the birth, and even the least prudish and most patient of you will be pushed to the limit. I never got used it, and I still *hate* being asked to 'lie down on the bed and bend your knees up'. Except by my husband. Unfortunately it's just part of being a woman, and the only way to deal with it is to stop thinking of yourself as a person and throw yourself into the glamorous role of 'car going in for a service'. If you can be an Aston Martin rather than a Ford Mondeo that will also help.

I'm scared of all the pain

This is a very good sign. It shows you are a normal, healthy, sensible woman who knows that squeezing a hard object the size of a basketball through your very small and delicate parts will hurt like hell. It also shows that you have put some considerable thought into the 'motherhood' issue, and have already reached the critical stumbling block. Good. Now you progress past this point by realising the following:

- ☆ Giving birth is the most painful thing you should ever experience. It is agonisingly, excruciating, faint-inducingly painful.
- ☆ Once you have done it, no other pain will ever seem as bad (until you do it again).
- ☆ Doesn't the fact that some women go through it more than once show it can't be *that* bad? Actually it is that bad, but Mother Nature has solved this by ensuring that…
- ☆ You will forget how awful childbirth is almost immediately.
- ☆ Not all women find childbirth terribly painful.
- ☆ The drugs work. No pain; lots of gain.
- ☆ Put it in perspective: when the result of this pain is your own baby, who will grow into a child, an adult and then the bearer of your grandchildren, and will fill your life with more joy and love than you can imagine yet, what's twelve hours of pain, really? I would go through a month of pain to get the children I have now. Ahhhhh.
- ☆ The pain stops abruptly once the baby is out. Most discomforts and pains linger on for ages and gradually just peter out. Not childbirth: it's excruciating one minute, and then it's completely gone the next. And *that* feels fantastic!
- ☆ Going through childbirth gives you the automatic and unquestionable right to have the tapless end of the bath, never take the bins out and have a foot tickle every night for the rest of your life. If he does question this right, suggest you shave his testicles with a cheese-grater, and see how fast he moves.

What if things go wrong between me and my partner?

Not the most optimistic way to approach motherhood, but if you *will* examine every depressing possibility then I guess I would agree that having a baby puts a vast amount of strain on the relationship you have with your husband, or partner, or whatever we're calling him or her. Whatever your relationship is now, it will be completely different once you have a baby, and even well before that moment actually comes. The only way of succeeding is to **TALK about EVERYTHING** and to know where you stand before you get too far down a road you're not happy with. There is more about this in **New Relationships** in Part Eleven, but, until then, perhaps telling your

partner about your concerns is a good idea, as is setting out to make it work instead of preparing for it to fail.

I'm too old/ I'm too young

Well at least you can't be worrying about both of these!

There is no 'good time' to have a baby – what suits some people doesn't suit others. I did it very young, which means I had tons of energy (never underestimate how important this is), my body didn't suffer very much, by the time I was thirty I had all my child-bearing days all over with, (I think, but I still have all the baby clothes in the attic) and I will be able to wear my daughters' far more fashionable clothes very soon. BUT, I missed out on my carefree, childless twenties, I didn't manage to get my career going as I might have liked, my husband and I had very few years alone together, and I now have to do the career and kids things at the same time.

Older mums have the advantages of enjoying a successful career first, often having more money, being more self-confident and sure of what they want and wanting the time away from work to enjoy being a mum. BUT, it is harder to get pregnant as you get older (tick-tock, tick-tock); you will find the exhaustion harder to cope with; your body will probably suffer more and be harder to get back into shape; you will find all those years of independence and smart, child-free living very hard to leave behind; and you may find it harder to get back to work at the same level in your late thirties or early forties.

Both ways are good and both are bad. I would just urge as many women as possible to remember the biological clock. Science is great and everything, and there have been some huge advances in fertility treatments, but the wobbly bottom line is that, in the same way that 8 inch stilettos are not designed for rock climbing, so we are not designed to have babies in our fifties. We can still do it, but it's a heck of a lot harder. Just wanted to get that off my pert-ish chest.