

sat nav

The SatNav to a perfect pregnancy

WORDS BY
ALANA KIRK-GILLHAM

Most parents wish we had a little voice in the background telling us which way to turn when faced with the great unknown of all things pregnancy and parenting. 'What should I do?' is the question parents regularly ask, topped only by 'Is it possible to be this tired and still alive?'

Through time, mothers have cried out for a little map to show them the way through the body changes and the sleepless nights; a little navigation through the pitfalls of pregnancy and the mayhem of mothering, and a little honest advice on the not-so-cute side to it all. So this is it: your own personal SatNav to help you negotiate your way into perfect parenting.

HOW TO NAVIGATE YOUR NEW AND EXPANDING BODY

You can turn left or right, but whichever way you look in the mirror, your body is going to prepare for pregnancy long before your mind catches up. Make sure your wardrobe grows with it, especially your bras. Borrow where you can (you will be able to lend your bought maternity clothes

out afterwards) and buy classic items that can be complimented by non-maternity clothes. You'll discover bits of you that you never knew existed. You'll lose sight of your feet, and you'll be able to balance your cup of tea on your tummy. There is no turning back down this one-way road. Embrace it.

HOW TO NAVIGATE YOUR WAY THROUGH THE ENDLESS OPTIONS OF CHILDBIRTH

Know where you are going, but always be prepared for a U-turn. Books and antenatal classes will give you the impression that you're going to have a choice and be in complete control of your body when it comes to the big day, but make sure that you arm yourself with information on pain relief and birthing positions and be prepared for that carefully laid out birth plan going up in a puff of epidural! Babies have a funny habit of letting you know that from day one, this is a two-way street. Be open to new directions.

HOW TO NAVIGATE YOUR WAY THROUGH THE MINEFIELD OF ADVICE AND AVOID EXPLOSIONS

Don't get stuck in the traffic of chatter. You are going to get advice, as surely as you are going to get big. There'll be lots of it; most of it conflicting and some of it downright dangerous. Choose a person you respect and admire and make them your oracle. Ignore everyone else. And remember: advice is just an opinion – you are under no obligation to take it.

HOW TO NAVIGATE YOUR WAY THROUGH THE FIRST FEW HOURS

You need no directions. You won't need to be told this. 200,000 years of evolution will kick in and wrap you up in wonder. Rest, let others swarm and fuss around you, hold your baby and enjoy the most precious moments of your life.



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HOW TO NAVIGATE YOUR WAY THROUGH THE FIRST FEW WEEKS

Anyway you can. You might not know what direction you are going in some days and, despite the love and the wonder, these weeks can be brutal. You are exhausted, sleep deprived and overwhelmed. Know you will come to the end of this road, cross the Bridge of Breakthrough and come out the other side. Get as much sleep as you can, ask for as much help as you can, and forget everything else but keeping you and your baby fed and loved.

HOW TO NAVIGATE YOUR WAY THROUGH BREASTFEEDING

Don't keep going round the roundabout. On one hand, breastfeeding is the simplest concept in the world. It's free, perfectly produced and doesn't involve sterilising and heating bottles at 3am. Nearly every mammal in the world does it. Keep this in mind if things are initially a struggle, and you end up with nipple guards, a sore neck and cracked nipples. Persevere if you can and it will fall into place. If you decide it's not for you, be content with your decision and move on.

HOW TO NAVIGATE YOUR WAY AROUND BODILY FLUIDS

This might stop you in your tracks. Nothing and no-one is ever going to be

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able to prepare you for the sheer volume of body fluids you will have to wipe up, catch, wash out of clothes (including yours) over the next few years. Babies produce more poo and vomit than is humanly possible for their size. Get used to it and buy industrial size Dettol.

HOW TO NAVIGATE A PRAM THROUGH SHOPS

Get in gear - this is one of life's great challenges. Achieve this and your days will become almost manageable. Make outings based on child (especially pram) friendly environments (ask friends or check out before your baby is born). Go where there the aisles are wide and the doors are easy. In cases of emergency (or sheer

frustration) treat your pram as an armoured tank and plough ahead regardless of traffic restrictions. The great thing about prams though is they are excellent bag carriers.

HOW TO NAVIGATE YOUR WAY THROUGH (YOUR) GROWING PAINS

It's OK to be an L-Driver until you get to know the paths of parenting. Some mums are born along with their baby. Others take more time to grow into the role. Don't expect to be a racing driver on the first day. Only by practising the routes day by day do you become better. Learn the rhythms and mechanics of your baby and soon you will be cruising in fifth gear. But don't forget to always wear a seatbelt!

HOW TO NAVIGATE YOUR WAY BACK HOME - TO THE PERSON YOU WERE BEFORE.

Don't get stuck on the roundabout. You become another person when you become a parent. But you also remain yourself. At times you lose yourself in one and dream of being the other. Find the balance. There will be times when you need to be one or the other, but eventually you will find a way to be both.

Drive carefully. You have a precious passenger. Children take you on the scenic route of life, so don't forget to enjoy the ride. *