

# LIFE BEFORE BIRTH

## Introduction

By David Chamberlain, Editor

Through many windows of observation, we can now see--for the first time in human history--what is actually happening in the womb. There is good news and bad news. We can no longer think that the placenta can protect the prenat from anything bad going on in the mother's body, or that the mother's body can protect the prenat from bad things going on in the world. Mother and baby face together the perils of air, water, and earth compromised by the toxic residues of modern chemistry and physics. Parents are perhaps the last ones to learn (and their children the first ones to suffer) these tragic realities of modern life.

Pollution has many sources, beginning with the physical environment surrounding the mother and father. Numerous chemicals loose in the environment reach them where they work or find them in the garage or in cleaning supplies in the kitchen. Solvents, metals, pesticides, preservatives, fumes, and various forms of radiation are capable of causing birth defects. Chemical pollution also reaches us in the medical system through prescribed drugs which put the well-being of the prenat at risk. Some medicines do their damage around the time of birth, including powerful anesthetics and a variety of other drugs used in hospitals. Not long ago, an antibacterial soap used widely in hospitals and dispensed in public areas was discovered, after years of use, to be neurotoxic.

Parents, too, are a source of contamination and injury to the unborn baby as a consequence of their lifestyle and habits. Drugs thought to be harmless to adults can be harmful to children because children are not able to handle these chemicals in adult doses. Nicotine, caffeine, and aspirin are substances ubiquitous in adult life which can affect the growth and development of babies. The damaging effects of alcohol are especially well known, but much research has already shown the different types of damage done by "street drugs" as well. All these discoveries are revealing the profound importance of very early parenting, beginning, not at the time of birth, but even before the time of conception when it is still possible to avoid a host of serious problems.

An additional reason for parents to begin active parenting at this very early stage is the discovery that babies in the womb are also developing more rapidly than previously thought possible. From the second month of pregnancy, experiments and observations reveal an active prenat with a rapidly developing sensory system permitting exquisite sensitivity and responsiveness. Long before the development of advanced brain structures, prenat are seen interacting with each other and learning from experience. They seem especially interested in the larger environment provided by mother and father, and react to individual voices, stories, music, and even simple interaction games with parents. The quality of the uterine environment is determined principally by the parents.

The opportunities for parents to form a relationship with the baby in the womb are significant and remarkable. This contrasts sharply with the previous view that prenat did not have the capacity to interact, remember, learn, or put meaning to their experiences. Only a decade ago, doctors typically told pregnant mothers and fathers that talking to a baby in the womb was useless and unrealistic. Now there is mounting evidence for memory and learning in utero and for precocious communication before the stage of language. These abilities of unborn babies underlie the successes reported in a series of scientific experiments with prenatal stimulation and bonding. They are also a basis for the personal stories occasionally shared by children and adults about their experiences before birth.