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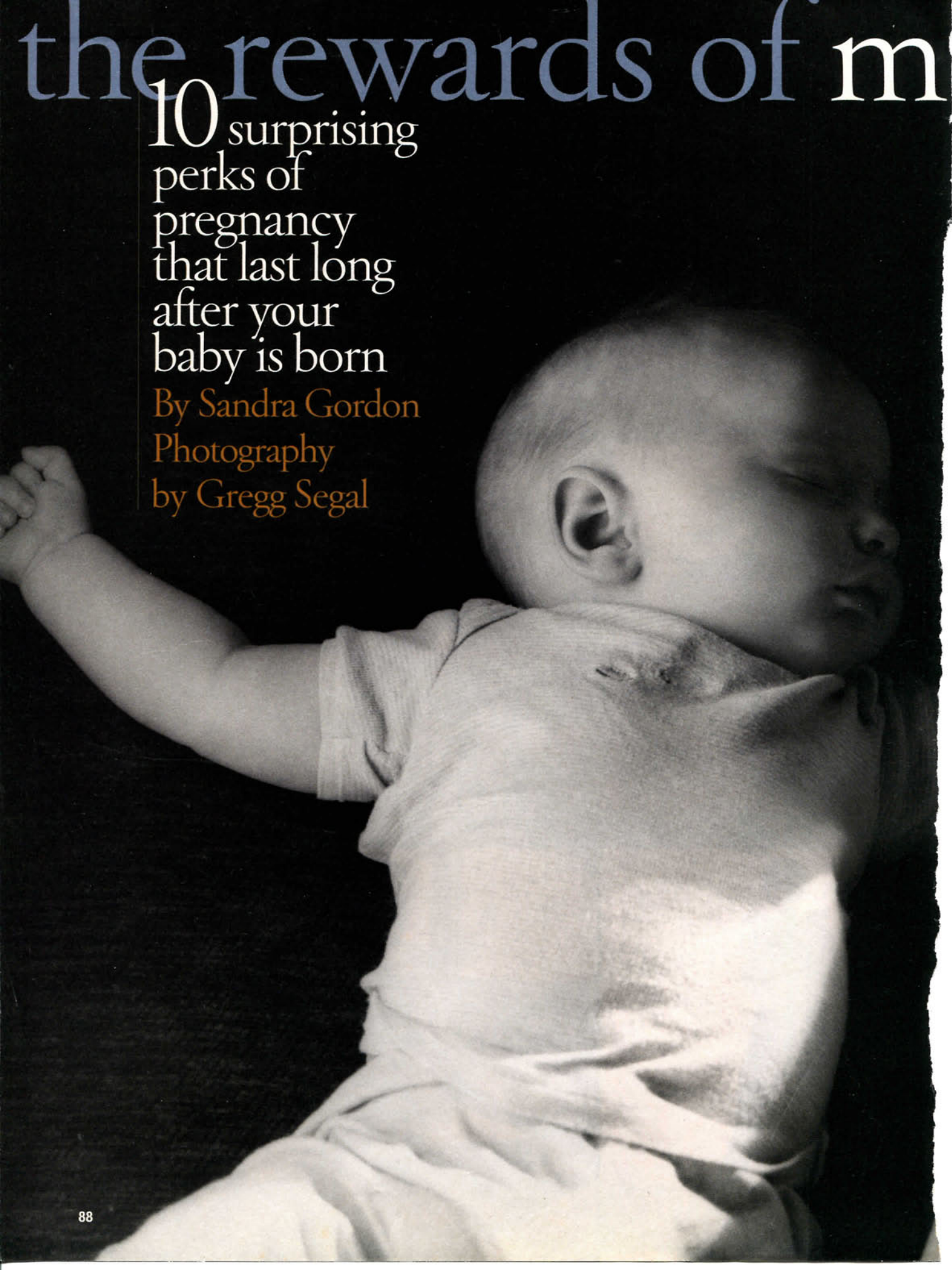


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# the rewards of m

10 surprising  
perks of  
pregnancy  
that last long  
after your  
baby is born

By Sandra Gordon

Photography

by Gregg Segal

# motherhood



After nine months of carefully tending to your growing belly, then perhaps hours of life-altering labor, you get a big prize to take home: a baby to nurture and cherish. But the benefits don't stop there. Here are 10 ways pregnancy and motherhood can reward you physically, mentally and emotionally for years to come.

**1. A better body image** After experiencing pregnancy and childbirth, you may regard your body with a more forgiving eye. "I no longer think, 'My thighs don't look right, my feet are kind of ugly, and my pores are too big,'" says Heather Sullivan, 28, the Oxford, Miss., mother of 2-year-old Fiona. "Pregnancy helped me look at myself as a whole person rather than a collection of sometimes-flawed parts."

"I have a new appreciation for fuller breasts and a padded hip," says Tanya Tabachnikoff, a 35-year-old media relations director from Brattleboro, Vt. "There's something about knowing the flesh and warmth of my body is the most secure and comfortable place in the world for my child [1-year-old Chaya]."

**2. A broader world view** "Having children gives you a whole new capacity for feeling," says Genevieve Belfiglio, 44, a mother of three in West Windsor, N.J. Suddenly, the evening news hits home. Seeing men and women go off to war, for example, is difficult to ignore. "You think, 'They're somebody's children.'" Likewise, a school shooting reported in the national media makes you want to get involved to prevent similar tragedies from happening in your area.

"I have more interest in what's going on around me," says Sue Reddy, 39, a public relations consultant in Plantation, Fla., and mother of a 6-year-old. "It's my home and my son's home, and I care about what it looks like and how it functions and what businesses are near the school," she says. "Before, I never paid attention."

**3. A new career perspective** Juggling motherhood and work is a constant struggle for many women. But ultimately, one can benefit the other. "Having children helped me in my business because I'm more understanding and flexible with my employees," says Beth LaBrecche, 34, owner of a Minneapolis public relations firm and mom to 3-year-old Sam. "I can also relate on a new level with my clients, most of whom are parents."

Because you're not dependent on your career for your whole identity, becoming a mother can give you a deeper feeling of job fulfillment. By becoming a mother, you often gain a sense of balance, explains Shellie Fidell, M.S.W., L.C.S.W., a therapist with Women's Health Care Partnership in St. Louis.

You'll also learn how to juggle many tasks simultaneously and fine-tune your time-management skills. "Before I had children, I went into tizzies about work," says Debbie Lum, 36, a marketing director in Tampa, Fla., and mother of two. "Now, my children are my first priority. I maximize my time so I don't bring work home unless I have to. It's amazing — when you slow down, everything still gets done."

Pregnancy helped me look at myself as a whole person rather than a collection of sometimes-flawed parts.

**4. A lower cancer risk** By having been pregnant, studies show, you'll reduce your lifetime risk of ovarian and breast cancer. "The theory is that fewer ovulations somehow help protect against ovarian cancer," says Susan Haas, M.D., chief of Harvard Vanguard Medical Associates, a division of OB/GYN at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. (You don't ovulate when you're pregnant.)

In the case of breast cancer, it's thought that pregnancy causes breast tissue to become "fully matured," according to Celia Byrne, Ph.D., an instructor of medicine at Harvard Medical School. "Until breast tissue reaches this stage, it may be more susceptible to potential cancer-causing insults from the environment," Byrne says. Thus, the younger you are when you become pregnant, the sooner you'll receive this pregnancy-related protection.

**5. Stronger bones** It's possible that the added pounds of pregnancy may increase your bone density and reduce your risk of developing bone-weakening osteoporosis later in life, especially if you also take part in weight-bearing activities such as walking, Haas says. One caveat: Be sure to get plenty of calcium (at least 1,000 milligrams a day) and vitamin D (400 international units per day) throughout your pregnancy.

**6. An enduring commitment to healthful habits** While you're pregnant, you pay extra attention to your

diet. You shun alcohol and caffeine, exercise moderately and regularly, take prenatal vitamins religiously and nap when you can. But as soon as you give birth, it's time to go right back to your old, not-so-healthful ways, right? No way!

For some women, like Jane Kornbluh, 41, a childbirth educator and owner of Body by Baby, an infant/mother exercise company in Brooklyn, N.Y., such healthful habits turn out to have staying power. "I smoked for 20 years, but as soon as I got pregnant, I was thunderstruck with the absolute ridiculousness of it," says Kornbluh, mother of 5-year-old Matteo. "I would never dream of smoking again."

**7. Closer family connections** Having children can make you more empathetic toward your parents. "You suddenly see what they gave up to raise you," says therapist Fidell.

"I never realized how much my parents loved me until I had children myself," says Kia Yelinek, 35, manager of a printing company in the Chicago area and mother of 3-year-old Alexander and 1-year-old Victoria. "Likewise, I'm so much more patient with my in-laws," she says. Their unsolicited financial advice, for example, no longer bothers Yelinek because she now understands the concern behind their comments. "Before I became a parent, I thought, 'Mind your own business,'" she says.

Motherhood can also change your relationships with other family members — particularly those who've given birth



themselves, says Ann F. Caron, Ed.D., a psychologist in Greenwich, Conn. Once your baby is born, don't be surprised if you feel more emotionally connected to your grandmother, as well as to aunts and cousins who are mothers. "There's a bond that develops, something special between women who've experienced having a child," Caron says.

**8. Lasting friendships** Having a baby can help you meet people you otherwise wouldn't have met, whether you're at a mommy/baby exercise class, the supermarket or a playground. "I've met so many other moms I've ended up developing relationships with," says Sallie Delaney, a 33-year-old public relations executive from Newton Centre, Mass., who still meets with her new-mothers group more than two years after the birth of daughter Sophia. Granted, you still have to click with fellow parents. But if you

Having children gives you a whole new capacity for feeling. Suddenly, the evening news hits home. Seeing men go off to war, for example, truly affects you.

You think, "They're somebody's children."

do hit it off, the baby-inspired friendships you develop now could end up being lifelong.

**9. An increased capacity for selflessness** A baby's 24/7 demands can make you feel like a doctor on call. But having to think of someone else's needs besides your own can make you a more responsible and well-rounded person. "The birth of my son definitely made me less selfish," says Terry Gibbens, 35, a San Rafael, Calif., stay-at-home mother who, before having a baby, was accustomed to spending weekends mountain biking and participating in sailing regattas with her husband. Although the

couple have found ways to keep doing what they enjoy, their 18-month-old son's needs now clearly come first. "We take him with us in his bike seat on smooth trails, and he's been day-sailing on the bay during nice

*(continued on page 126)*

# SEE YOURSELF IN Fit Pregnancy

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## Be a Model of Fitness

Occasionally, *Fit Pregnancy* stars a healthy expectant reader in an exercise article. If you'd like to be a *Fit Pregnancy* reader model, send a clear, 5-by-7-inch photo of your face and one of your full body (pregnant if possible) in workout wear (include your name, address and phone number on the back of each photo), along with a description of yourself, your workout schedule and the completed model release (below). No payment is offered. Each model will receive a *Shape Fitness Music* audio-cassette, a video and a T-shirt. Expenses for travel and accommodations are the responsibility of the reader model.



## Tell Your Birth Story

*Fit Pregnancy* publishes Birth Stories of women who faced challenges during their pregnancy, labor, delivery and postpartum months and who emerged stronger than before.

To readers whose stories are printed, *Fit Pregnancy* awards special prizes, including a *Shape Fitness Music* audio-cassette. Send us clear, uncut, full-body color photos of yourself while pregnant and after (no Polaroids). Include your name, address and phone number on the back of each. Also complete and return the model release form (below).

Tell us your story in 600 words (type-written and double-spaced). Describe in detail your pregnancy and/or birth challenge, how you felt while you faced it, and how your friends and family reacted. If your story involves changes in your diet or exercise routine, include three maintenance tips, as well as a description of your prenatal and postpartum workout schedule.

*Fit Pregnancy* recommends moderation in your exercise and diet programs, especially during and immediately after pregnancy.

We will not return photos or stories. Please do not phone us to ask about your story.

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ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

TODAY'S DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ FOR READER MODELS: WHAT IS YOUR DUE DATE? \_\_\_\_\_

BIRTH DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ HEIGHT: \_\_\_\_\_ SHOE SIZE: \_\_\_\_\_

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Mail to *Fit Pregnancy* Reader Model/Birth Story, 21100 Erwin St., Woodland Hills, CA 91367.

## 10 perks

(continued from page 92)

afternoons," says Gibbens. "We try to include him in most things we like to do, but we always make sure we adjust for his comfort level."

**10. A stronger marriage** The demands of a new baby, combined with sleep deprivation, can test the strength of any relationship. "After our daughter was born, we had some of the most stressful times since we made our wedding plans," says media relations director Tabachnikoff. The unexpected payoff? "Having a child has brought us closer," she says.

ur marriage has taken on a whole new dimension. It's not just a marriage anymore; it's a family.

"I feel much more secure in the marriage. We have a permanent bond."

Indeed, after the new-baby adjustment phase, many women report that they feel emotionally closer to their partners. "We often see marriages grow a lot deeper and become more rewarding," says Fidell. "Especially when people come from two different career tracks, they can be very focused on themselves as individuals." But having a child together creates a sense of shared responsibility.

"Our marriage has taken on a whole new dimension," says Teresa Horner, 37, a St. Louis stay-at-home mother of five. "It's not just a marriage anymore — it's a family." ■

**Sandra Gordon** is the co-author of 30 *Secrets of the World's Healthiest Cuisines* (John Wiley & Sons, 2000) and the mother of 8-month-old Rebecca.