

(introductory music)

**DISCLAIMER:** *Taking Back Birth* is a production of the Indie Birth Association and indiebirth.com. No material on this podcast should be considered medical advice. Birth is not a medical event.

**MARYN:** Hi. This is Maryn from Indie Birth. Welcome to our series of podcasts called *Taking Birth Back*. We're up to quite a number now of different podcasts, and we began a couple months ago with the beginnings of prenatal care and what that means and how we can help ourselves look to the inside and make our own choices. So here I am at about 21 weeks with my seventh baby and eighth pregnancy and trying to find the timeline. I'm trying to follow—excuse me—the timeline of a pregnancy. So today we're going to focus on connecting with your baby.

I feel like this is a good departure from the last bunch of podcasts that have really focused on ourselves as women, our pregnant bodies, some politics, birth choices, prenatal choices, and not a whole lot of focus on the actual baby yet. Which, of course, is the main important thing really. So we know that babies are feeling and thinking and experiencing things long before they are born. That is not a new concept. Long gone is Freud at least in this instance. As far as babies not being able to feel anything or remember anything until they are children. I don't believe that. I guess there are people that do. You'll hear plenty of people say that a baby won't remember a circumcision, for example. And that's absolute nonsense because, of course, babies think and feel and remember.

So the same for the fetal period. The fetus. I don't like to use that word really, but the baby in utero definitely feels and thinks. And that is where a lot of research is always being done and has been being done for the last bunch of years. So we know that babies are conscious probably from conception that we all began as conscious beings. And when exactly things happen we don't know. We do know some fascinating things about this period, about the 20 week mark, that I'm going to share with you today. But a lot of it is still unknown and being studied. And a really interesting area of development, if you are interested, known as prenatal psychology. Prenatal and perinatal, which would be after birth, psychology are real and legitimate areas of science where scientists are looking at how being in utero affected the baby and the person.

So for it to affect a baby, of course, I think you have to believe that that baby is indeed taking it in and able to be affected. So prenatal psychology is real. It's fascinating. The 20-week mark, again, marks an important development for the baby mentally and emotionally. So we're changing our focus, like I said, from sort of the mama focus and what's going on in pregnancy to this soul that we're getting to know. And I personally am feeling sort of touched by that just that it's really sweet to be focusing on my baby

now as an individual and wanting to take the time to honor this soul, this baby, and see what I can learn about the baby right now. What she's up to, what she's capable of, how I can deepen our connection.

So I feel like exploring that today. And it comes at the perfect time. Again, for me personally, but I think it's just a really good time in pregnancy about this half way mark. The baby is moving strong enough to feel, so we're more inclined to talk to the baby and interact. It's definitely a real thing now that the baby is there and that the baby is growing and is indeed separate.

So I'm always blown away having had a bunch of pregnancies and wonderful kids how the person inside is indeed a person. It's just one that I don't know yet, at least in the sense of how she looks or what her cry will sound like. But I'm able to get to know her as best I can in the way that I can with her being inside. So I'm always fascinated by that. She is already directed by her own needs and wants just really as anyone would be. And I guess just being small sometimes we take that for granted or some people don't believe that. But it's true.

So this one is as much for me as anybody. Research ring where my baby is at is a way of me connecting with her more, and it was really fun to do. So I'm going to just give a few suggestions really today from what I've learned, and you take it and run with it if you'd like. There is plenty of books and resources out there about connecting with your baby and, again, about prenatal psychology if you're interested. And I'll try to give you a few suggestions here at the end.

So physically, I just wanted to be more in tune with what the baby looks like. Now I know what a developing fetus looks like, but, at about five months or 20 weeks, the baby weighs about a pound. So a little more, little less. I know when I'm feeling other women's bellies the way I've always remember the 20 week mark is the baby is the size, usually, of about your hand stretched out. And that's the baby from, they say, crown to rump. Sort of curled up. But weight wise, again, about a pound. Little more. Little less. Between 7 to about 9 ½ inches. And, obviously, everybody is different, so babies are no exception.

And the individuality may start to come into play here. So some babies are going to be a little longer, and some babies are going to be a little shorter. Eyebrows and eyelashes begin to form. And the baby can suck her thumb. Her hands have a grip, and she begins to swallow fluid—amniotic fluid—at this point. So when I was listening with the fetoscope yesterday, I heard the hiccups. Now I felt hiccups before. And if you haven't felt hiccups before, they feel just like rhythmic little jumps that you can literally locate somewhere on your belly.

At about 20 weeks, I'm not feeling them yet. But I did hear them, and they sounded pretty much what I would expect with the fetoscope. The same rhythmic sound of a hiccup. You're just hearing it instead of feeling it. So that was kind of cool. I don't think I've ever heard hiccups this early before. There is a thin layer of skin on the baby. Not too much fat yet. Of course, the fat kind of comes at the end. And the baby is starting to secrete vernix on the skin. And vernix is that really thick, cheesy kind of coating that the baby develops on the skin to protect the skin from being in the amniotic fluid.

Also the baby has lanugo on the skin which are the fine hairs. So vernix and lanugo usually, by the time the baby is born at full term, are minimal. And sometimes there aren't—there isn't any vernix or any lanugo left especially if the baby is past a due date. But at this point, it's very plentiful. And if you've ever seen a preterm baby, 28 weeks or 30 weeks or 32 weeks, there is just tons of vernix. So it's a protective mechanism for the skin. And this is when it starts being secreted.

So, of course, we can hear with the fetoscope. And it's easier than it was a couple weeks ago. And it's louder. And it's usually more predictable. Feeling position at this point is still kind of hard. So whether it's your own belly or you're feeling someone else's belly, 20 to 21 weeks is still pretty early to be figuring out what's a head, what's a butt, how the baby is lying in the uterus. It certainly can be done, I'm sure, depending on the woman and the baby. But it isn't until about 28 weeks, I'd say, that you can really get definitive about it.

So at this point, at least on my own belly, it's kind of hard. I don't know exactly what the lumps and bumps are that I'm feeling. I do know about where to listen for heart tones, if I want to, with the fetoscope. And they seem to be pretty predictable. And if not, I can find them pretty easily. A lot more easily than I did a couple weeks ago. So that's really fun. Just even having that connection.

And many babies are head down already, at this point. But many babies are not. They're in all kinds of funny positions. And breech is one or sort of lying sideways. They're small for being half way through pregnancy. I know I used to think, "I expected a 20-week baby to be bigger in the uterus somehow." But they're not to me anymore. They're just still pretty small. I mean a pound, of course, is not very big. And the movements I'm feeling at least are still pretty tame. Still pretty gentle. So, again, not able to tell a whole lot about position. But that's kind of fun in its own way too because that becomes something that gets pretty clear in a couple weeks.

So the main development with a 20, 21, 22-week baby is that the hearing apparatus is complete. Actually, it's not complete. Let me restate that. It's at its beginning stages of being able to hear basically. It's not completely formed. The baby will go on to be able to hear better and react more readily to sounds and music by the third trimester. But at

this point, the baby is sort of just coming into having that ability. So if you were to play music to your baby or talk to your baby, there are definitely studies that say this is the time where the baby takes that in. And I just think that's really special. You read this stuff in a book. And, at least when I'm not pregnant, it doesn't sort of hit me as hard. These amazing developments that all of us, as human beings, have gone through.

That we started as a bunch of cells and here we are about 20 weeks later. A fully formed person able to hear music. I just think that's—it's really fascinating. So I was kind of—I don't know. I thought it was really fun to learn that this week. Or be reminded of that this week. The baby also has periods of drowsiness and sleep, and those alternate with activity. So that's pretty common sense, I think, at this point because you're feeling movement sometimes but not all the time. And it's almost like you can feel when the baby is sleeping.

So the baby also starts to respond to touch from the outside which is cool. And certainly not as much as the baby will as he or she gets bigger and stronger and more reactive to the outside world. If you've ever felt a baby in someone else's belly or your own, especially at full term, they really do react. If you're stroking a leg, it'll kick you. And you can talk to the baby and literally get movement. So this is just the beginning of that. So if you haven't had a baby before, it's really fun to explore that. And when you feel the baby move, to touch those parts of the baby and to stroke the baby or to talk or gently poke the baby and see if you get a reaction. That's sort of that unspoken communication.

So those are some really fun things going on. One resource I really appreciated and I'm kind of rereading here in this pregnancy is a book about bonding and the prenatal psychology called *Nurturing the Unborn Child* and Thomas Verny is the author. He's a doctor. He has a couple books. It's really an amazing book. So it's for an entire pregnancy. I just happened to repick it up right now. But really it's something that one could start the day you know you're pregnant. "Nine months worth of bonding, stimulating, soothing, and communicating with your baby." That's the headline on the book.

So this isn't a new book. It was published in 1991. But I think it's an invaluable resource for all pregnant women. And, again, like any book, there are definitely things in there I may personally not agree with. There's tons of different exercises and visualizations and meditations and mantras and all kinds of ways to connect with your baby. And you may not like all of them or identify with all of them. But I think most women could find something in this book that really just made them smile about connecting with their baby. And I think that's what it's all about.

I think in this world, especially, we struggle more than we need to in pregnancy. And we forget all the amazing things going on, and we forget to take the time to just enjoy them. So I think it's a fabulous book especially for those of us who are taking full responsibility. And that could mean you're not seeing anyone for your prenatal care. You're doing unassisted prenatal care. You're not doing any prenatal care. Prenatal care as we know it. As in medical care. Or it's just fine if it works for you to be checking in with a doctor or a midwife. But this book doesn't take the place of any of those things because this is something just totally unique that you're able to do on your own time, in your own way, to connect with your baby.

So I do think it's important because connecting with your baby can have so many benefits besides the obvious. It's a nice thing to do. You get to know the baby. You can connect in a way that allows you to receive information from the baby. And you would have to read all of these books to get all that information on how to do that. But it's worth reading, I think, for sure. So he has the book. Again, it's *Nurturing the Unborn Child*. He has this book divided up by months of pregnancy. So this is from the chapter, 5 Months. And some of the suggestions, if you're not gonna get the book or don't have it handy, are really fun. And, again, not that earth shattering. Just kind of fun stuff now that the baby can hear. Is starting to hear.

So reading the same story to the baby once a day or twice a day is one of his suggestions and exercises. And I remember doing this with my first pregnancy 11 years ago. And I didn't know—I didn't know in my head any of this stuff. I guess I just felt intuitively that it would be nice to read the baby the same story every night. So it was just a nice ritual, if anything else. The science does say that babies that are read the same story every night through a pregnancy or whatever it is twice a day do recognize the words. And, of course, it's not necessarily the story but the mother's voice pattern, the way she talks. These are all really unique things that make us who we are, and our baby is learning to identify with us.

So even me doing these podcasts is, in a sense, reading to my baby. Just because my baby is getting to hear me speak and identify my voice. So you can do the same with yours. You don't have to do podcasts. You can read to your baby. So simple books, of course, are suggested. When I read to my daughter 11 years ago when she was in uterus, we read *Good Night Moon*. So really simple, short, easy kids book. Something like that is—makes it nice and easy for you.

The other suggestions, again because the baby is in this world of being able to take in things audibly, is music. So singing the baby a lullaby or a simple tune or a nursery rhyme even through pregnancy starting now. Again, the studies have shown that when these babies are born they do recognize the tune. And often babies that are colicky or upset when they're newborns can be soothed with the music that they recognize

because they definitely recognize it. That's a fact. So that's a cool suggestion. In our case, we have lots of kids. So the kids have gotten into singing to the baby. And it's not the same song, honestly, for us every night. But it is what it is. They can sing to the baby. The baby can hear their voices. They also like to play music for the baby. We have a really big organ that you plug in that someone gave us. And it's quite loud. So I don't doubt at all that the baby can hear that through amniotic fluid.

So in our own way, we're doing our communication. And I think we can all sort of choose our own ways and just knowing that sound and music and stories and words are able to be communicated is really the point. You can kind of, I think, do with what you will. So, again, the baby is specifically tuned into the mother's voice. That's a fact. So our babies like to hear us talk. And as far as dad's, of course, babies I'm sure don't mind it, but they don't identify in the same way with the dad's voice usually until after birth.

So I think that makes sense. Our voices are coming through to this little being in many different ways. Literally the vibrations of us speaking are being carried through our bodies into the bodies of our baby. So it makes sense that our voice, our heart beat, everything that goes in our body is really being imprinted onto this little being's. And, again, babies are just at a time right now, at about 20 weeks, where this is becoming more of a reality. They're being more affected by all kinds of things. So not just our voices, not just what they hear but also our emotions. And, again, this book and some other books I'll recommend are really good for finding that quiet space to just connect with the baby. And nobody is perfect. We all have bad days. We all scream and yell sometimes. But being conscious of what we do say and what we do feel, at least to an extreme, because we know our babies are able to sense these things.

So, again, that's probably nothing new. Also in the book, he suggests keeping a dream journal. And that's something he suggests throughout the book. So there's a specific way that he explains how to do that, if you're interested as far as some amount of dream interpretation and what things mean. And then just using your dreams to communicate. So if you're interested in that, it's a great book for that as well. Affirmations and just some different exercises are included in the book. One I want to try is mandala drawings. So if you've ever seen a mandala, it's just a circular kind of pattern. And he goes through how to do one and why you would want to do one. And sort of how this can soothe your consciousness and, again, sort of make you a more positive vessel, I guess you should say, for the baby.

So some other parts of the book I like that weren't in the five month chapters, but he says that there's things all through the book really that later in pregnancy you could use. It's just like a onetime only thing. He has some really sweet visualizations that I've been using this week. So one I really liked was just being quiet, having your hands on your

belly, and not only talking to your baby but visualizing the baby in her environment or his environment. So visualizing the baby, what she might look like, every little part. Her little eyes. Her ten little fingers. Her ten little toes. The way she is curled up in there. Maybe she's sucking her thumb. What the cord look like. How it's pulsing and bright blue and full of oxygen and how healthy the placenta looks and that blood flow. And just swimming in the amniotic fluid. Just creating this really positive, healthy, whole visualization of your baby. And sending the baby love. Not with spoken words necessarily but just energetically sending the baby love through the cord and knowing that these really lovey, motherly, wonderful feelings you're able to create about this baby can be felt by him or her. And it's really special if you think about it.

I guess having six other kids—I certainly have days where I feel like this baby doesn't get much attention at all yet. So I don't need much time for something like this. I can do it the five minutes before I fall asleep. Just that last little thing of the day to say, "Hi. I am thinking of you. And I'm putting my hands here, and I'm sending you love. And I picture that you're beautiful and healthy and growing and serene and feeling great in there." So that made me feel really good this week. And I'm sharing that with you in hopes that you might want to try that or read this book or both.

Some other resources before we go is another book by the same guy, Thomas Verny, *The Secret Life of the Unborn Child*. And this book, I believe, came before the nurturing one. And it's just sort of the groundwork for understanding the prenatal psychology and what we know so far. And the book is definitely older. So for more current, up-to-date information on parental psychology there's tons out there. There are always articles. There's always research. I mean there's entire foundations that focus on that, if you're interested. But these books are a good place to start, and they're both really good.

Another one that I've read at least parts of is called *Remembering Your Life Before Birth* by Michael Gabriel. And that sort of takes it to another level in the sense of the books I've mentioned already, the Verny books, are focusing on the baby like this baby and how things we do as the mom may or may not affect this baby in uterus. However, the Gabriel book, *Remembering Your Life Before Birth* is just what it sounds. It's about adults being able to do this rebirthing experience where they're able to recall details of their birth. So it sort of gives you that flip side of we all remember this experiences.

So as you're connecting with your baby and imprinting these good vides, you have your own. And some of the nurturing book, at least, does deal with your own birth because it makes sense that if we have issues with that or if maybe our imprinting was as positive as it could have been that we also can address that. And that's a mode of healing and in connecting with our own babies now.

So thank you so much for listening today. This has been a shorter podcast, but one I hope you've enjoyed. And just remember we, at Indie Birth, are there for support for all women whether you would like a consultation or somebody to have on the phone during your birth. We appreciate all positive feedback and comments for our podcasts. You can do that on iTunes or on our site. This helps us reach more women when they know what the content is or how valuable it has been to them. So we really appreciate you listening and have a great day. Thanks.

(closing music)