Sleepless Over Sinuses

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ABSTRACT

In this humor column, a prenatal educator finds herself sleepless over recent changes in breast anatomy.

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My good friend Libby Rosen, a lactation consultant from Topeka, Kansas, is visiting. An activist to her core, Lib is currently doing doctoral research on whether mothers who breastfeed are any more or less sleep-deprived than those who bottle-feed. Lib is passionate about sharing the details of her study, but yesterday I found myself dozing off as she elaborated. I wonder if bouts of perimenopausal insomnia can be correlated to whether I breastfed my now college-age children?

For whatever reason, I thought as the children grew I would one day catch up on missed sleep. Here I am, two decades postpartum (yawn) and waiting. Between ear-aches, swim meets, driver's education, and, most recently, heartbreaks, I am not sure parents ever feel rested again. As Gilda Radner's Roseanne Roseannadanna used to say on *Saturday Night Live*, "It's always something."

These days, my REM cycles are interrupted not by crying babies but by hormones screaming for my attention. I find myself wide-eyed at 4:00 in the morning with my brain full of random topics in need of further contemplation or, better yet, graduate study. Take the anatomy of the breast, for example.

Recently, Peter Hartman, from the Department of Biochemistry at the University of Western Australia, published an updated, more accurate illustration of a lactating breast. In the new version, milk ducts channel throughout breast tissue like tortuous roots of a tree, rather than converging and pooling in uniform milk sinuses around the areola. How did they miss this in 1956 or 1876? What other details of the female anatomy might be misrepresented? The clock ticks, and I wonder if someone should do a graduate study on this topic. I try to distract myself by remembering plots from old *I Love Lucy* TV shows. Then, something comic Roseanne Barr once said comes to mind.

It was Roseanne who suggested the uterus is actually a tracking device. Her theory explains why many men have difficulty finding things. A man can stare into a refrigerator for 10 minutes, unable to locate the cream cheese. Meanwhile, within 10 seconds and from across a vast room, a woman not only can spot the elusive dip ingredient, but also calculate the net carbs and Weight Watchers points at the same time.

While men were out hunting buffalo, our foremothers gathered specific medicinal plants from among fields of similar foliage. It is widely accepted that these well-honed skills make it possible for today's woman to look into a kitchen drawer piled with junk and retrieve a nail clipper, AAA battery, and an earring back. My husband could not find a wooly mammoth if it were hiding in the same drawer.

Maybe the biologist who misjudged our winding milk ducts also missed the real mechanism behind spotting rare herbs and garage sale signs? What if women actually do possess a global pelvic positioning system or GPS?

Battling this midlife insomnia, I realize the model we use in our breastfeeding classes needs updating. Perhaps adding a GPS to my padded pelvis will be next. "It's always something," I think, as I climb out of bed. It's 3:00 a.m. I think I know where my children are. I know where my teaching supplies are. But I wonder where I put my sewing machine?

DEB GAULDIN is a childbirth educator who travels nationally presenting keynotes and workshops. For booking information, call 800-682-2347 or visit her Web site (www.debgauldin.com). Deb's CDs and tapes contain humor and songs about pregnancy, childbirth, and the adjustment to parenthood. They are available through Lamaze International (800-368-4404).

CHOICE

Freedom is not merely the opportunity to do as one pleases; neither is it merely the opportunity to choose between set alternatives. Freedom is, first of all, the chance to formulate the available choices, to argue over them—and then, the opportunity to choose.

— C. Wright Mills

One ship sails East,
And another West,
By the self-same winds that blow,
Tis the set of the sails
And not the gales,
That tells the way we go.

— Ella Wheeler Wilcox

What we call the secret of happiness is no more a secret than our willingness to choose life.

— Leo Buscaglia