

Peekaboo tactics and other parenting advice

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By MATT WIXON / The Dallas Morning News

Right now, thousands of expectant parents are at hospitals eagerly awaiting the arrival of what they are sure will be the cuddliest, most lovable, most amazing and saintly creature in the world:

The doctor with the pain medication.

After that, those expectant parents will greet what truly is the most lovable, most adorable, most saintly creature to enter the world: a baby. More specifically, a sleeping newborn baby – the pinnacle of serenity, sweetness and innocence.

And then the little angel will wake up, and Mommy and Daddy will become basket cases.

"Why is my baby not sleeping through the night?" parents ask during their baby's first year. "Why is she not saying Mama or Dada? Why is he not able to grasp a peanut from the carpet?"

A better question is "Do we want our baby, who puts everything in his mouth, to grasp anything from the carpet?"

You bet you do, according to the baby experts, who are writing feverishly to assure that parents will have a panic attack before their first child makes it to training pants. Your baby should be sleeping through the night at 3 months, the experts say, and be able to sit without support at 7 months. Consult your pediatrician if you have questions.

Fine. Here's a question for my pediatrician: One baby-guru book tells me my 4-month-old should be able to pay attention to a raisin. Well, how can I tell if my baby is following the raisin with his eyes or is just following my hand holding the raisin?

Luckily, not every guidebook is designed to convince moms and dads that they are unfit to care for a Chia Pet, let alone a baby. Three titles are even (parents may remember this word from before they had children) *fun*.

Baby: An Owner's Manual

Steve Tague and Julie Long (Broadway Books, \$10.95)

Written and organized like an owner's manual for a new car, this book has sections on filling, cleaning, lubricating and covering the baby and provides tips on how to set the baby's clock to avoid owner sleeplessness.

It also includes a diagram of the baby's parts, product specifications, optional features and scheduled maintenance. It highlights the differences in the two models, BABY-XX-G and BABY-XY-B, and includes the important note that BABY-XY-B may spray without notice.

The owner's manual also has important safety tips for parents, such as what to do if they smell gas – "clean unit's exhaust area thoroughly and attach new rear cover." New owners are advised to reduce the risk of shocking the unit by not exposing it to electrical outlets, wires or obnoxious relatives. The manual even includes a troubleshooting guide for parents suffering when their beloved unit's "display panel" constantly blares its "audio-alert system."

As far as assessing a unit's performance, there is nothing about paying attention to a raisin. The manual stipulates that a 4-month-old might be able to hold its processor (head) steady and pull hair from its owner's head.

Sadly, the manual makes no mention of when to rotate the wheels on a unit. But as an authorized service provider of my own BABY-XY-B, I suggest doing it while singing "The Wheels on the Bus Go Round and Round."