

By the #1 International Bestselling Author

**9
MONTHS
THAT
COUNT
FOREVER**

*How your
pregnancy diet shapes
your baby's future*

JESSIE INCHAUSPÉ

The Glucose Goddess

Advance Praise for
9 MONTHS THAT COUNT FOREVER

“This book cuts through confusion with science and heart. It explains how nutrients like protein and omega-3s shape a baby’s growth, while reassuring parents that knowledge—not perfection—is what matters most. Clear, evidence-based, and empowering, it’s an essential guide for anyone who wants to understand how food supports life from the very beginning.”

—Mark Hyman, MD, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Young Forever* and *Food: What the Heck Should I Eat?*

“In this groundbreaking book, Jessie Inchauspé shines a long-overdue light on the critical role of blood sugar health during pregnancy, not only for a mother’s well-being today and across her lifetime, but also for the health of the next generation. It offers healthcare providers and mothers-to-be the answers I have shared with women for decades in my work as a midwife and physician. I am thrilled to see this knowledge so clearly articulated and widely amplified. We have the opportunity to profoundly impact women’s lifelong health, and pregnancy is one of the most powerful times to do so.

This book is an important key.”

—Aviva Romm, MD, midwife, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Hormone Intelligence* and *The Natural Pregnancy Book*, and founder of The Mama Pathway

“I love this book. Jessie Inchauspé’s 9 Months That Count Forever is a revelatory guide that transforms the outdated ‘bun in the oven’ myth into an empowering call to action, showing how everyday food choices during pregnancy can profoundly shape a baby’s brain, body, and lifelong health. Backed by rigorous science and laced with the author’s warm, personal insights, it’s the essential companion every expecting parent needs to nourish not just survival but thriving.”

—Daniel G. Amen, MD, Amen Clinics, author of *Change Your Brain, Change Your Pain*

“As a registered dietitian who has spent her career helping women understand their bodies, I can say this book is a breakthrough. In a world where women are still expected to navigate pregnancy with guesswork and guilt, Jessie offers truth, science, and grounding. She has a rare ability to turn complex biology into practical, life-changing tools, giving women clarity instead of confusion, and empowerment instead of fear. This work is not just helpful—it’s revolutionary. Every woman deserves the knowledge in these pages.”

—Vanessa Risetto, MS, RD, CDN, CEO and co-founder of Culina Health

“Jessie’s book offers beautifully clear, science-based guidance to help expectant mothers optimize their babies’ health. By focusing on essential nutrients like choline and omega-3s, she makes it easy to understand how to best nourish the developing baby’s brain and body. This book is not just a guide, it is a blueprint for maximizing the potential embedded in pregnancy and beyond. I highly recommend this vital information for all future mothers.”

—Dr. Venita Patel, MD, neurodevelopmental pediatrician and functional nutrition specialist

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9 MONTHS THAT COUNT FOREVER

*How your
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*To all who mother—
in body, in spirit, in longing, or in memory.*

Dear reader, I've referred to the baby as "he" in this book, because I had a baby boy and I was thinking about him as I wrote. But please replace however you see fit.

You are not an oven

Have you ever baked something in an oven? A cake, a loaf of bread, vegetables? You set the oven's mode, its temperature, the timing, and your trusty appliance does what it promises: heats up the space to a number of degrees for a certain amount of time.

So let's say you are baking a delicious cake. You select, buy, measure, and prepare the ingredients. You sift them, melt them, whisk them, combine them. When the batter is done and you are satisfied with it, it goes into a pan, then into the oven in question. But importantly, once the cake is baking, it can no longer change. The oven can't transform a chocolate cake batter into an upside-down banana cake. It can't add sugar, tweak the amount of vanilla, or add more bananas. It can't change the quality of the flour or the provenance of the eggs. As long as it doesn't break on you, or randomly change its temperature along the way, the oven simply does its appointed job: it bakes. Everything else about the cake is already set.

With no transition, let's now talk about your *uterus*. Do you know what your uterus and the oven have in common? Not much. Even though you might have heard people say they have "a bun in the oven" when referring to growing a baby in their womb, this analogy is misleading: it implies that your baby is entirely predetermined when the sperm meets the egg. It sends the message that all you have to do now is keep the temperature at 98.6°F, try not to do anything obviously harmful (cigarettes, drugs, bungee-jumping while drinking vodka), and just wait forty or so weeks. It sends the message that you are a vessel of oxygen, nutrients, and heat, and that you are simply *allowing* your baby to grow. The conveyed sentiment is something along the lines of "don't stress, just let nature do its thing." But this is wrong.

My job is scientific research, and in my previous work I've explored how blood sugar affects our body and mind. I wrote two books in which I shared small habits that can keep our glucose levels steady to improve our health and well-being. It helped me, and lots of other people too. So when I became pregnant, I used those same skills. I dove into

the latest studies on pregnancy nutrition conducted by scientists across the world. I found decades of published evidence, population surveys, and fantastic books—all full of crucial information that every mother needs to know. I found that we are far from simple ovens: during pregnancy, we are actively **influencing our baby**, his cognition, and his long-term health with what we eat—or don't eat—during these nine months.

I discovered many shocking facts—for example, that 90 percent of pregnant women are not eating enough choline, a key molecule (which we get from foods like animal liver and eggs) that forms a baby's brain cells in the womb, and that can positively influence his memory and attention levels. Seventy percent of us are also consuming too little protein, a lack that can not only erode our own muscle mass but may also program our baby's body to build less muscle and develop weaker organs. Other interesting research suggests that sugar cravings during pregnancy may be driven by an ancient biological mechanism—originally meant to ensure that we supplied enough energy for the baby—that's now backfiring in today's overly abundant food environment. Indeed, most of us eat more sugar when pregnant than when not pregnant (partly due to old wives' tales, such as “you're eating for two,” which leads us to eat more sweet foods than we might need to). But sugar in pregnancy can impact your baby's brain development; and is linked to the likelihood of mental health disorders later in life, as well as diabetes, high blood pressure, and obesity as an adult. Worrying, to say the least. And gestational diabetes, a common condition during pregnancy in which your blood sugar levels become too high, also has a real impact on a baby's long-term health. Further, the majority of pregnant moms don't eat enough DHA during pregnancy. DHA is an omega-3 fatty acid that helps your baby's neurons (the brain cells that process information) connect with each other, while also lowering the risk of allergies and reducing the likelihood of preterm birth—a complication that is rising worldwide and carries its own long-term consequences. Along the way, I uncovered fascinating explanations for many common pregnancy experiences, from new insights into first-trimester nausea to how your body composition changes after birth.

I also learned something that changed the way I saw pregnancy forever: by the time your baby is born, the vast majority of his neurons are already formed—and *they won't get replaced*. This means the nutrients you provide during these nine months help shape the foundation of his brain for a lifetime.

Another key insight has to do with your baby's DNA. While you can't change the genetic code your baby inherits (half from the mom, half from the dad), the story doesn't end there. DNA is not a fixed script set in stone at conception. During pregnancy, something remarkable happens: **you influence which of your baby's genes are expressed and which remain silent**. This process, called epigenetics, works through chemical switches that turn genes on or off. Scientists call it **foetal programming**, and diet is one of the strongest forces shaping it. In practice, this means your baby is born with an epigenetic profile influenced by what you eat—and if you have multiple children and eat differently in your pregnancies, your children will be programmed differently.

The resounding message of all this research? That your diet while you are pregnant with your baby has a lifelong impact on him.

I know it's a lot to take in, and rest assured: it's not your fault that you don't know this. I didn't know any of it, either. If you've already had children, they are okay—your body has ways to compensate and ensure your baby grows in a healthy manner. But the power of nutrition is poorly communicated in standard medical care during pregnancy, and unless your job is to research scientific papers, the information is unlikely to just show up on your doorstep. What's more, the science is clear and exciting: diet during pregnancy plays a role in shaping your baby's development. It's *not* just a case of “set it and forget it,” like a bun in the oven.

Indeed, another common but much more accurate way to describe the relationship between you and your baby is as a seed planted in soil. The seed contains crucial genetic instructions: whether it will become a palm tree, a rose bush, or a tomato vine. But as any good gardener knows (not me), the *soil* is crucial. It's not as simple as “plant it and it will grow tall and healthy.” A rich, dense, diverse, fertilized soil will lead to a healthier tree than a soil that hasn't been tended to. The soil is co-creating the tree's genetic plan, and the tree will adapt to its environment, making do with less if less is available.

It's the same during pregnancy: your baby may not always get what he needs, and he will differ in who he is based on what he has access to and what he is exposed to in your womb. That gives you a lot more power than you have probably been told. While you can't choose the seed, you have an extraordinary influence over the soil.

When I first dove into the research, I was both shaken up and over-eager—cue swallowing chunks of frozen beef liver (more on that in Chapter 2). But I was also

fascinated, and determined to put the most useful principles into practice. So I distilled everything into a handful of key habits that could improve my baby's health, and that I could actually manage while also crying constantly because of the hormones, juggling work, moving apartments, and feeling overwhelmed by all the planning to welcome my baby.

A few months later, I began sharing what I had learned with friends who were expecting. Their strong reactions to the science—first shock, then empowerment—made me realize just how deeply this information was needed. That's when I decided to gather it all into this book, so more people could benefit from it.

I've kept things simple: We start by looking at how diet affects your baby differently during the nausea-prone first trimester, compared to the rest of pregnancy. Then we dive into the heart of the book—**four chapters, each focused on a dietary principle designed to give your baby a powerful advantage for life, what I call the “pregnancy building blocks.”** Every section is packed with cutting-edge science and concludes with an Action Plan providing practical tips and recommendations you can start using right away. Toward the end of the book, you'll find a final chapter on several smaller topics such as coffee and alcohol, then a deep dive into the science of labor and birth (as well as what helped me during them), guidance on breastfeeding and formula, a dedicated section on supplements, a full trimester-by-trimester recap, and the collection of scientific references. I end the book with recipes to help bring everything together.

Chapter 1 is all about what happens to your blood sugar during pregnancy. After you eat starches or sugars, your blood sugar (glucose) naturally rises. These increases are called glucose spikes. During pregnancy, your body becomes less efficient at handling them, so spikes can be sharper and last longer. This matters: they can program your baby's DNA toward certain outcomes, and even set the stage for a lifelong pull toward sugar. I'll also share what to do about cravings, and how managing sugar can lower your child's future risk of conditions like type 2 diabetes. In Chapter 2, you'll meet choline, an extraordinary nutrient hiding in plain sight, with a measurable influence on your baby's brain development. Chapter 3 will reframe how you think about protein, why your muscle mass matters during pregnancy, and why the fact that most of us are protein-restricted can impact our child's body composition even after birth. In Chapter 4, you'll discover DHA, an omega-3 fat derived from ocean algae that helps your baby's neurons connect

and communicate, and which is essential for brain wiring in the womb. Most moms are not getting enough of these three building blocks—choline, protein, and DHA. In fact, **studies show fewer than 10 percent of pregnant women in high-income countries reach optimal levels.** Like I say, this isn't (yet) common knowledge.

I'll end the introduction with this: when you are pregnant, you are a scientist-magician-life-grower with real superpowers. And if you know how to use them, you can positively impact your baby's health for his entire life. So let's get to it.

Some quick housekeeping

First things first: if you don't do any of the things in this book, your child will most likely turn out fine. When my mother was pregnant with me, she ate Special K cereal with a mountain of sugar on top every morning for breakfast—and washed it down with Diet Coke. And I ended up okay: aside from an unhealthy obsession with cats and a daily existential crisis or two—totally normal.

Except... in all fairness, there's a long list of physical and mental health issues I've experienced over the years, from panic attacks and depersonalization (a condition with which you feel like a stranger in your own body), to borderline prediabetes in my twenties. And I can't help but wonder: *What if some of them trace back to what was happening in the womb?* Maybe it was the Diet Coke, maybe it was fate, maybe I was just destined to be a cat enthusiast with mild existential dread. I'll never know for sure—and actually nor do I need to: I'm a functioning, mostly healthy adult, and I get along fine.

So if you've had kids before and were not aware of this science, or if you're only discovering this book late in pregnancy, don't worry. When it comes to the fundamentals of growing a baby, you already have them: your body (including your uterus) and access to oxygen and food.

While the science in this book may seem overwhelming at first, it's certainly not intended to make you feel guilty or scared. It's here if you're curious about the extra optimizations you can make. Even if you take just a few ideas from these pages and use them now and then, that's fantastic. You don't have to do everything every day (I certainly didn't manage to).

I should also add that this science is by no means a magic bullet to the perfect pregnancy and the perfectly healthy baby. You could follow every principle in this book to the letter and still face things that are beyond your control (I'll share a recent experience of my own on the following pages). What you eat is not the only factor shaping your baby's health: access to medical care, socio-economic status, the environment your baby is

born into, genetics, sheer luck or randomness, things that we don't understand yet, and more, play their part too.

Pregnancy may be a time when you feel like many of the changes that are happening to your body are out of your control, but nutrition is one of the few things you *can* influence—and the simple, science-backed changes I am proposing can genuinely give your baby a stronger start. Today, with chronic diseases on the rise and ever-younger people facing challenges like mental health disorders, diabetes, and high blood pressure, anything that strengthens the womb environment matters—especially given the amount of research pointing to links between a baby's experience in utero and the risk of these, as you'll soon learn. The point is: if you are in the know, you might as well put as many odds in your baby's favor as you can. And you don't need to wait until you get pregnant—applying the principles in this book prepregnancy will help set you up for success. It's never too early to start.

Second bit of housekeeping: I'm a biochemist, not a doctor. Think of me like a science translator or teacher. I gather published research from scientists around the world, health agency guidelines, physiology textbooks, and break them down into simple, practical insights you can actually use. As a result, everything in these pages is based on population-level data and guidelines—it's meant to inform and empower, not to diagnose, cure, prevent, or treat any condition or disease. It doesn't account for your unique medical history or circumstances, and isn't medical advice, so it's essential to check with your care team and a qualified provider before making any changes to how you eat or manage your health.

My story

Trigger warning: this section discusses pregnancy loss. If that's not something you want to read about today, go straight to the next chapter.

Dear reader: if we haven't met yet, I'm Jessie. It's nice to meet you. I wrote most of this book while I was pregnant with my first-born, a son. But this wasn't my first pregnancy. I want to share the story of what happened, because I felt so alone when it did and I wished more people had shared their own journey with me.

I first became pregnant at 31 years old, two months after removing my IUD. My husband and I were really happy that it happened so quickly. I told everyone straightaway (literally the day I got the positive pregnancy test), and I started preparing myself for the fact that our baby would be born in December.

I began researching pregnancy nutrition, and started writing the first few pages of this book. I went into my scans with great enthusiasm: it didn't even cross my mind that something could go wrong. The health of the baby wasn't a concern—I was, however, stressed about all the usual things: where I was going to give birth, whether we needed to move apartments... It all felt very real, very fast. I had my first scan at just five weeks—we could see a tiny little amorphous thing. Then our second scan a month later, around ten weeks: we heard the heartbeat and we saw the embryo, a bit less tiny, little amorphous thing. It was a great experience.

Even though I started getting quite nauseous around that time, we still felt very excited, picking out names, and wondering about the baby's sex. At around 14 weeks, we were back in the doctor's office for our next routine check. And, as usual, I lay back on the table and the doctor put some gel on my lower stomach and I watched the screen for the image to come up. As soon as it appeared, I knew the pregnancy was over—the little embryo hadn't changed much since the previous time, and it was at the bottom of my

uterus, scrunched up and lifeless, like you would imagine a dead fish at the bottom of an aquarium.

After ten seconds of silence the doctor confirmed what I had already understood: there was no more heartbeat. The pregnancy had stopped a full three weeks previously (around 10½ weeks), and I hadn't even known. I hadn't felt anything, nor had any miscarriage symptoms. It's called a "silent" miscarriage. The embryo stops developing, dies, but your body does not expel it.

I felt like life had been knocked out of me. I started sobbing as the doctor told me that I needed to have a procedure. I was in complete and utter shock—from thinking I would be a mom in six months, I now had to accept that it was all over. Legs-stop-working-drop-to-the-ground sort of pain. I remember later screaming in my living room and begging the universe for my baby back. Arguing that the doctor must be wrong and that he had made a mistake. I was really confused about my relationship with my body—that the dead embryo had been inside me for almost a month and I had known nothing about it; and that I now had to live with it still there, until the procedure. I couldn't believe this had happened.

I think one of the reasons I was in so much shock and disbelief is that the idea of a miscarriage was not really in my consciousness. Yes, I had friends going through IVF who had experienced one, but I didn't know that miscarriage is also common in people who are trying to conceive naturally. I wasn't prepared for the possibility, partly, I suppose, because it is rarely discussed. I thought: "I'm young, I'm healthy, what can go wrong?" I didn't know that miscarriages can happen to anyone: that about one in five pregnancies end this way. And even though I subsequently learned that my pregnancy loss was probably due to DNA abnormalities beyond my control, I of course wondered if it was something I did.

So we found a hospital, and when they informed me that I would need to go under general anaesthesia for the procedure (a vacuum aspiration) that was even harder to deal with. I hate going under: it reminds me of a traumatic spine surgery I went through when I was 19 years old.

As I conveyed the sad news to the people around me, the reactions ranged from helpful and supportive, to very out-of-touch—"don't think about it." To feel less lonely, I looked up "celebrities who have had miscarriages." It sounds silly, but I desperately

wanted to feel some sense of kinship, connection. I wanted to know that other people had gone through this too. The more I reached out, the more tongues untied and I learned that many people close to me had also had the experience of pregnancy loss—but they had never mentioned it before. This seemed tragic to me. I felt desolate, and an utter wreck.

The procedure was scheduled to take place on a Friday at 1 p.m. The night before it, I had been invited to go on one of the biggest evening live TV shows in France, something I had been really looking forward to. I could have canceled at this point, but I didn't. From a career perspective, it was one of the most important weeks ever for me; from a personal perspective, one of the worst in my life. As I walked onto the set and pretended everything was absolutely fantastic, (3... 2... 1... *you're live*), I did my best to hold it together—to manage the idea of the dead embryo in my womb while doing my work justice on this show.

Then came the procedure. I kept repeating to myself something that a close friend had said to me: “May this passing be peaceful.” This sentence still makes me cry. I woke up from the anesthesia. I felt really sad, really mad, and so empty.

It was June. A week later it was my birthday. By now, my despair had turned into anger: Why do some people have pregnancies where everything is fine—where they're not stressed, they have no issues—and I have to go through this? It was hard to process. Unimaginable gut-wrenching pain and having to hold back tears every time I saw a pregnant woman on the street.

The hormones dropping away combined with the grief put me in a frantic spiral for weeks as I experienced every single emotion at once. I had to rewire my brain, my expectations, our timeline. I also felt embarrassed and ashamed. People do not know how to talk about pregnancy loss. I felt that I made those around me uncomfortable. I oscillated between thinking “Why is nobody asking me how I'm doing?” to “I hope no one mentions it.” So then on top of being mad at the world, I was mad at my family and my friends for not knowing how to handle it. Great.

I drank inordinate quantities of coffee and numbed myself with work. Writing helped, singing helped, speaking to people who had gone through this and were able to talk about it openly helped. Reading other people's stories helped. My husband just being there

helped. What *didn't* help was seeing people announcing their pregnancies online (“Why is everyone having a baby all of a sudden?”).

And then I got the all-clear from the doctor. At first, I thought I needed to be completely emotionally healed from the pregnancy loss before it was okay to try again. I quickly understood that this would never happen. The grief of the loss would always be there, coexisting with whatever else happened in my life. So we started trying again, and it was really difficult. The uncertainty, the wondering if it would take years, the many, many pregnancy tests, the hope, the stress. It was a real trial of the heart.

I was still grieving three months later when I got a positive pregnancy test again. I knew I was really lucky that it had happened so quickly. But I couldn't square in my mind the happy news with the grief I still felt. So I didn't allow myself to be happy. I didn't allow myself to even believe in this pregnancy. I was 100 percent certain I was going to miscarry again. We didn't tell anyone. We didn't get emotionally attached at all. It felt too vulnerable to do so.

I had a very challenging first trimester, not because of the nausea—which was easier this time—but because of the constant, crippling anxiety, the checking of my underwear for blood every time I went to the bathroom, the daily internet rabbit holes (“If I feel nauseous one day and then the next day not, does it mean I have had a silent miscarriage?”), the crying, the stress (and the doctor urging me *not* to stress—so helpful, thanks).

I sobbed for 24 hours before each scan, fearing I would again see a lifeless little embryo on the screen. Each time, as I was given good news—“everything is fine”/“the blood test is normal”/“it's going well, see you in a month”—I was happy for 48 hours. Then the anxiety and fear would creep back in. I wished I could have an ultrasound every day to put my mind at ease. At three months I tried to shift my feelings about it all. I wanted to allow myself to believe in this baby, instead of being constantly convinced the worst would happen. My therapist said something beautiful that really helped: “You don't know what is going to happen. But you can allow yourself to love this baby for as long as he is with you.” I slowly opened my heart to some joy—the first time I felt him kick was wonderful... But then I didn't feel anything for two weeks. Cue anxiety all over again.

About five months into the pregnancy, I started to breathe easier. I felt like things might turn out okay. The daily kicks really helped. We told our friends around this time. I

started writing this book again.

I'm sharing all this because, while I consider myself pretty well informed, I was absolutely not prepared for this miscarriage. It hit me hard. I hope things will change—that pregnancy loss will become less of a taboo, and that we will all become better equipped to support people going through it. And, in case this has also happened to you and you felt alone too, I hope that sharing this story was a little bit helpful.



The experience of losing my first pregnancy profoundly changed me. It made me deeply appreciate how precious and fragile the process of creating a life can be. Because yes, there is so much we can't control—how long it takes us to conceive, how we feel along the way, whether loss happens. But there are also things we *can* control. And one of the most powerful is what we put on our plate during the crucial nine months of pregnancy—how we nourish our body and our baby, day by day. Through the choices we make about food, we hold quiet superpowers. These are opportunities like no other. That's what this book is about.

The trimesters

