

## MOTHER AND CHILD EMPOWERMENT- CHAMPIONING THE FUTURE OF GHANA

How often have we heard of the connection between the health of the mother and that of her child? Indeed, research shows that health is an inheritance whether of a state of robust health or debilitating sickness. It is a choice that is made by the mother, while in conception, that will directly impact the health and development of a person's first 40 years of life longer than the life span of many Africans.

The wealth of a nation is determined by the health of its people. In our quest for good health, we must educate and empower a very important foundational source: the pregnant mother. The need for greater attention to the nutritional, psychological and emotional needs of the pregnant mother cannot be over-emphasized.

In July, 2005 Major (Rtd) Courage Quashigah paid a visit to a modern African village in northeast Africa, Dimona, Israel. After 35 years and over 1100 births, the African Hebrew Israelites have an infant mortality rate of .025% and maternal mortality rate of 0%. He asked, "What are they doing right?" Hence, the Regenerative Health and Nutrition Program, was formulated as a component of his new health paradigm.

The Mother and Child Health care training module empowers health care providers, pregnant women and parents with the keys to bring forth healthy babies and ultimately a healthier society.

Trainees are introduced to a series of holistic concepts and interactive phases, each component leading to the other to be more effective overall. We begin by emphasizing a ***Positive State of Mind***: what a mother eats, thinks and feels, directly affects her unborn child. Their immediate environment also affects mother and child greatly. The fetus is a living being from the moment of conception, capable of thriving upon positive interaction with its parents. The ear is the first of the five senses to develop: after 24 weeks, the ears play a major role in programming the development of a baby's first emotions and learning skills in the womb.

We then follow with techniques for ***Proper Breathing and Focused Concentration***. Mothers must be focused and relaxed throughout their pregnancy. These relaxing techniques also inspire confidence. "Breathing" the baby down instead of "pushing" creates an atmosphere where they can remain in control during the birthing process. Delivery is thus for mother and child.

***Personal Hygiene*** factors in as a key component of health care. As mothers change physiologically, they must adjust accordingly. They glow naturally with the "light of life", from their clean and fresh-smelling hair and loose-flowing garments that will not constrict their circulation. Emphasis is placed on the use of natural soaps, deodorants and shampoos, the wearing of pure cotton garments (particularly undergarments), along with proper breast care.

Ghana's national health policy of "***exclusive breastfeeding***" for the first 6 months of an infant's life is critical for the healthy development of the child. In these early months, the child receives vital nutrients from breast milk that boost the immune system. This makes

her diet during pregnancy and beyond, extremely important. It must contain the proper balance vitamins, minerals and nutrients necessary for proper development. We encourage a plant-based diet: plenty of fresh fruits, vegetables, nuts and grains, and plenty of water.

*Exercise* during pregnancy? Of course! The specially-designed, though simple antenatal exercises are a highlight of the training, for both male and female participants. Exercise not only strengthens, but provides the increased flexibility, stamina and energy needed throughout the pregnancy and during the birthing process. Mothers are encouraged to exercise twice weekly for about 45 minutes and to take daily early morning walks. She uses this time to take in the sunshine and fresh air while bonding spiritually with her unborn child.

Now, don't forget *Rest and Relaxation!* These are important elements in the relief of stress experienced by all pregnant women. Proper rest allows the body to regenerate and re-energize, while relaxing massage can stimulate circulation and relieve those aches and pains commonly associated with pregnancy (lower back pains, tight shoulders, abdominal pressures, etc.)

During training we demonstrate not only antenatal massage, but also infant massage. The mothers and babies are always quite accommodating and pleasingly satisfied. Massage techniques incorporated in your daily baby care routine will tighten the bond between mother and child, sharpen their mental development and encourage better circulation elimination.

One thing we have found to be quite effective are the positions that our mothers choose for delivery. We don't confine our mothers to lying on the examination table during delivery. She can choose to squat, supported by her husband or the birthing attendants or use various sitting positions. These positions are assisted by the force of gravity, and combine with focused breathing techniques to achieve a safe and stress-free birth.

We attach particular importance to the role of the father during pregnancy and post-partum periods. A good farmer must give proper attention to the care, nurturing and development of the seed. The same goes for a good father. His role is to support his wife throughout the birthing process in order to ultimately enjoy their "fruit", their precious child. The support given to women in conception by their husbands allows them to travel on this special journey, more confident and at ease.

Our desire is for those who have been exposed to the Regenerative Health and Nutrition Program to take possession of these basic principles and assist in making Ghana not only the "Gateway to Africa" but the "Gateway to good health".