



## Your Baby's Microbiome

The Critical Role of Vaginal Birth and Breastfeeding for Lifelong Health

From the Directors of the Award-Winning Documentary *Microbirth*

Toni Harman and Alex Wakeford

\$19.95 • Paperback Original

5 1/2 × 8 1/2 • 208 pages

ISBN 978-1-60358-695-5

**Pub Date: March 7, 2017**

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**“For expectant families, this is the must-read book of this generation.”**

**—LAUREL WILSON, IBCLC, CLE, CLD, CCCE, coauthor of *The Attachment Pregnancy***

**N**oncommunicable diseases (NCDs) are on the rise. Asthma rates have quadrupled in the United States since WWII,<sup>1</sup> food allergies among children are skyrocketing,<sup>2</sup> and cases of juvenile diabetes have increased by 60 percent in just over a decade.<sup>3</sup> Emerging research suggests a loss in diversity of the trillions of bacteria that live in and on our bodies—our microbiome—is to blame.

Toni Harman and Alex Wakeford's new book, *Your Baby's Microbiome*, addresses the critical role childbirth plays in establishing a baby's microbiome and kickstarting his or her immune system. And since 60 to 70 percent of the gut microbiome is complete by the age of three,<sup>4</sup> the microscopic events that happen during birth and breastfeeding may have significant ramifications for a child's lifelong health.

### The Problem:

Common interventions at birth interfere with the important microbial transfer from mother to baby.

- In modern maternity care, most women have at least one, if not multiple, birth interventions including induction, epidurals, antibiotics, instruments, formula feeding, or delivery via Cesarean section.<sup>5</sup>
- About one third of all births in the United States are by Cesarean section.<sup>6</sup>
- Children born by Cesarean section have significantly increased odds of developing asthma, type 1 diabetes, or celiac disease, and of becoming obese or overweight later in life.

### The Solution:

One way to help stem the rising tide of NCDs is to ensure optimal “seeding and feeding” of a baby's gut microbiome at birth using these strategies:

- Vaginal birth, when possible
- Immediate skin-to-skin contact after delivery
- Breastfeeding for as long as possible
- Implementation of more programs to promote and support vaginal birth and reduce the rate of Cesarean sections

1. According to Dr. Martin Blaser, director of the human microbiome program and professor of translational medicine New York University; author of *Missing Microbes*—world-leading microbiome expert.
2. “Food Allergy Basics: Facts and Statistics,” FARE—Food Allergy Research and Education, <http://www.foodallergy.org/facts-and-stats>.
3. In the study, type 1 diabetes had risen from 1.5 cases per 1,000 children in 2002, to 2.3 cases per 1,000 in 2013. “More US Kids Had Type 1 Diabetes But Researchers Don't Know Why,” *MedlinePlus* (December 17, 2015).
4. Kashtanova et al., “Association between the Gut Microbiota and Diet: Fetal Life, Early Childhood, and Further Life.”
5. According to Professor Hannah Dahlen, professor of midwifery, Western Sydney University—expert in epigenetic impact in childbirth and midwifery.
6. “Caesarean section,” *OECD Data*, <https://data.oecd.org/healthcare/caesarean-sections.htm>.



**Toni Harman and Alex Wakeford** are professional filmmakers who met at the London Film School more than twenty years ago. Since then, they have made four feature-length films together that have been distributed internationally, including their most recent film *Microbirth* (2014)—about how birth impacts a baby's lifelong health—which won the Grand Prix Award at the Life Sciences Film Festival in Prague.

<http://media.chelseagreen.com/your-babys-microbiome>