

Were having a

Why more couples want to know the sex of their unborn baby.

By Caren Osten Gerszberg y the time she was 20 weeks pregnant, Bonnie Judkins, of Norwalk, Connecticut, was tired of beginning sentences with "If it's a boy . . . " or "If it's a girl " She and her husband just wanted to know-so at her routine sonogram they told the technician they were ready to find out. They were delighted to hear that they were having a son, and Bonnie has no regrets about finding out in advance. "It gave me 20 weeks to dream about my baby boy," she says. Apparently the Judkinses are not the only ones with inquiring minds. In a poll taken of 500 Parents readers, almost

half wanted to know the sex of their unborn baby. So does this mean that the traditional delivery-room declaration—"It's a . . . !"—is becoming passé?

It's definitely less common. Today almost all insurance companies cover ultrasound screening, so most women have one at some time during their pregnancy. When they do, more and more of them are asking to be told the sex of their baby. "In the past 10 or 15 years, ultrasound technology has become more available and more reliable than it used to be," explains Molly Walker, a nurse-midwife who practices in the division of maternal-fetal medicine at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. "Among our patients, 99 percent will have an ultrasound at some point, and many choose to find out the sex." Ultrasound can reveal a fetus's sex at about 16 weeks, if the baby is in a good position; other tests that can determine the sex

Why do parents want to know?

of a baby are amniocentesis and CVS, or chorionic villus

sampling, which produce fetal chromosome (and sex) information as early as 14 and 9 weeks, respectively.

> For many, the reason is a practical one: It's easier to plan—and to shop. Deciding on names, wallpaper patterns, and baby-shower themes



'it' rather than 'he' or 'she,' or 'Matthew' or 'Abby,' " says Sharon Larson, of Eldridge, Iowa.

Sometimes an expectant mother who has dealt with a complicated pregnancy or previous infertility problem may be more likely to want to know the sex, because knowing something for sure can ease her anxieties. "These women want to know everything they can about their baby," says Cynthia Brumfield, M.D., associate professor of maternal-fetal medicine at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Positive information can alleviate some of the worry a mother may be holding on to from an earlier experience.

There is also an important medical reason to find out an unborn baby's sex: The information can be invaluable for couples at risk of conceiving a child with an X-linked or sex-linked disease, such as hemophilia. Because these diseases are transmitted through the X chromosome, males are affected because they have only one X chromosome; females have two, so they may be carriers of the disease without actually having it (and, in turn, may pass it on to half their sons). Knowing that

they're carrying a boy can help these parents prepare for the possibility that he will have the disease.

Ultrasound isn't foolproof

If you and your partner decide not to wait for the delivery-room surprise, keep in mind that ultrasound-the most common way to determine gender identity-is not proof positive. "Even in very experienced hands, ultrasound is by no means an open-andshut case. I tell my patients not to paint the room and not to buy too much, because there is a slight chance I'll be wrong and they'll have to repaint the nursery and stand in return lines with a newborn," says Nancy Judge, M.D., assistant professor of reproductive biology at Case Western Reserve University, in Cleveland.

It's a good idea, then, to be mentally prepared for either a boy or a girl. Talking to other mothers or reading books about both genders will get you ready for any truly unexpected surprises. They do happen: Walker recalls asking a transferred patient if she knew the sex of her baby. Yes, the woman told her, it was a girl named

Anita. So during delivery, Walker called the baby by name, encouraging her patient by saying things like, "I can see Anita's hair" and "Here comes Anita." Although this woman had originally wanted a boy, she had formed a strong bond with Anita over the previous several months. When the baby emerged, Anita turned out to be Roger Jr. "She was thrilled to have a boy, but now she had 'lost' Anita," explains Walker. "It was a shock for her and required a temporary adjustment."

What to do if you can't decide

Although most expectant parents tend to have a definite opinion about whether or not to find out the sex of the baby, there are those who just can't make up their minds. If you and your partner are not sure whether you want to know the sex, tell the

doctor, sonographer, and receptionist several times that you do not want to know right now. Clearly stating and repeating your position will greatly lower the risk of slipups. When the sonogram technician asked Susan Taylor, of Millburn, New Jersey, if she wanted to know the baby's sex, she replied, "No, umm . . . no." The technician then announced that the baby was a boy. When Susan cried, "But I said I didn't want to know!" the technician replied, "But you hesitated."

Some couples find creative ways to cope with indecision. When New York City parents Diane and David Beveridge went for a sonogram, they asked the sonographer to write the gender down and place it in a sealed envelope, which the couple then gave to David's secretary at work for safekeeping. "We initially figured we'd wait until the delivery to find out, but then we thought we might like to know," says Diane. "We decided to let David's secretary hold it, so we wouldn't make any rash decisions."

It's also not uncommon for partners to disagree about whether to find out the sex. Many couples who attempt to accommodate both partners' wishes end up with one leaking the information or the other begging to know it. But if you're careful, this big secret can be successfully concealed. Lisa Diana. of Cincinnati, wanted to be able to buy baby clothes and nursery decorations, and know the baby's name. Her husband, Joseph, had no interest in knowing. So she kept a special closet for the baby and waited until Joseph was out of the house before she unloaded things from the car. "I told him that if he looked in the closet, he'd know the sex of the baby, so he should stay away," she says. She kept her secret (she was allowed to tell one person, and chose her sister) until their son, Dominic, was born. "It was such a special time for both of us that I wanted Joseph to have his way too." Before trying this method, you may want to discuss with your partner how you, or he, will feel if the secret leaks.

Deciding whether to discover the sex of your baby or keep it a mystery is just the first of many exciting decisions you'll make together as parents. But as you talk it over with your partner, remember: Whatever sex your baby turns out to be, you'll come to love "it" just the same.

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Percent of readers who had a sonogram or amniocentesis during pregnancy and planned to find out their baby's sex: Percent of readers in agreement with their spouse over whether to find out the sex of their baby: Percent of those who found out and then told family and friends the sex: Of those who found out, the percent with no regrets: 91% Of those who didn't, the percent who were happy they waited: 97%

These findings are based on a poll of 500 Parents readers.