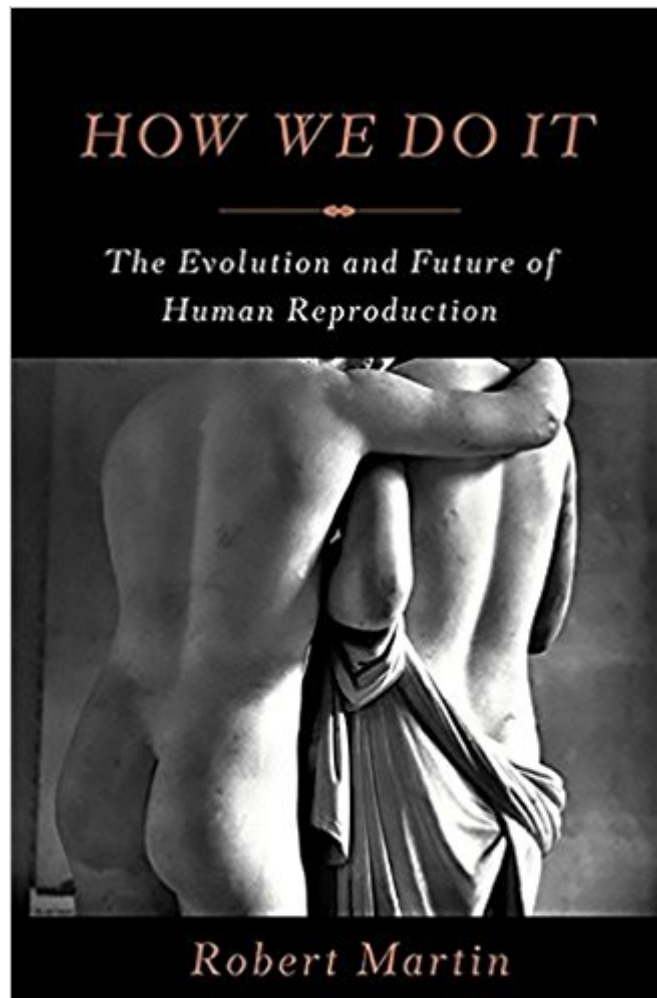




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How We Do It: The Evolution And Future Of Human Reproduction



Synopsis

Despite the widespread belief that natural is better when it comes to sex, pregnancy, and parenting, most of us have no idea what "natural" really means; the origins of our reproductive lives remain a mystery. Why are a quarter of a billion sperm cells needed to fertilize one egg? Are women really fertile for only a few days each month? How long should babies be breast-fed? In *How We Do It*, primatologist Robert Martin draws on forty years of research to locate the roots of everything from our sex cells to the way we care for newborns. He examines the procreative history of humans as well as that of our primate kin to reveal what's really natural when it comes to making and raising babies, and distinguish which behaviors we ought to continue—and which we should not. Although it's not realistic to raise our children like our ancestors did, Martin's investigation reveals surprising consequences of—and suggests ways to improve upon—the way we do things now. For instance, he explains why choosing a midwife rather than an obstetrician may have a greater impact than we think on our birthing experience, examines the advantages of breast-feeding for both mothers and babies, and suggests why babies may be ready for toilet training far earlier than is commonly practiced. *How We Do It* offers much-needed context for our reproductive and child-rearing practices, and shows that once we understand our evolutionary past, we can consider what worked, what didn't, and what it all means for the future of our species.

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Customer Reviews

This fascinating, comprehensive look at human evolution raises important questions about what everything from bottle-fed babies to assisted reproduction means for the future of the species. Martin, curator of biological anthropology at the Field Museum in Chicago and a member of the Committee on Evolutionary Biology at the University of Chicago, explains that he consulted more than 5,000 scientific papers and books to “distill the essence” of this vast subject. He succeeds in his stated goal to “maintain accuracy while writing plain English.” (A glossary that defines words such as aspermia, or a complete lack of semen, helps.) And this overview is filled with fascinating facts: it takes a quarter of a billion sperm to fertilize one human egg; apes and monkeys menstruate, but most other mammals don’t; regular sauna use can hurt sperm production because of the heat; fat tissue accounts for more than a pound of a typical seven-and-a-half-pound newborn; crib death is more likely in bottle-fed infants; and breast cancer is less common in nursing moms. A must-read for anyone interested in human evolution.

--Karen Springen

“This is one of the best books about sex, and having babies, you’re likely to read.... If you want to know things like why men have nipples or why it takes a quarter of a billion sperm cells to fertilize one human egg, you should take this white-knuckle ride back through evolutionary time, across continents, into science labs and around your most private parts. It will make you laugh. Your jaw will drop. And the sight of the mismatch between the lives we lead and the bodies we live in will start you thinking.”—NPR Books; [An] amiable information tour through the evolutionary history of mating, pregnancy, birth, and babies.... An intelligent, open-minded guide to the animal processes that somehow seem to make us most fully human.”—Boston Globe; Mr. Martin’s humble but crucial acknowledgment that biology is unavoidably complicated; that we can’t capture millennia of evolution or decades of research in glib sayings about the sexes’ planetary origins or in single surveys of psychology undergraduates; is what makes *How We Do It* so compelling.... No Mars and Venus, no extrapolations about why we evolved to love; or hate; strip clubs or whether bottle-feeding dooms a child to a life of puerile amusements and a career at the Kwik-E-Mart. Here instead are the facts of life as you may have never thought about them.”—Wall Street Journal; I have lectured for years on the topic of this book, and done research on primate reproduction. But even so, I kept coming across information and ideas new to me. The author’s knowledge is encyclopedic. From mating, through pregnancy and birth, to baby care, to contraception and its opposite, we get an absorbing account of the evolutionary and functional

biology of reproduction. Buy the book! It's a fascinating read, a real romp. —Alexander Harcourt, author of *Human Biogeography* and coauthor of *Gorilla Society*; Here at last is a thought-provoking, accurate, and entertaining account of the origins and present status of human reproduction. Robert Martin, a world authority on evolutionary biology, explores how evolution has shaped the patterns of reproductive physiology and the sexual and maternal behavior that characterize modern humans. He accomplishes this task with great clarity and wit. —Alan Dixson, Professor of Biological Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, and author of *Sexual Selection and the Origins of Human Mating Systems*; Intriguing [filled with] interesting factoids. —Washington Post; Misconceptions, cultural taboos, misguided assumptions about gender, and general prudishness have held back research on sex and its influence on the evolution of our species. Robert Martin's *How We Do It* provides a refreshing account of what we do know about the subject, how we got to this stage of awareness, and where we go next. Starting with an overview of sperm and eggs and ending with birth control and in vitro fertilization, Martin, who has been researching these subjects for decades as curator of biological anthropology at the Field Museum in Chicago, takes off the blinders. He puts human sex into the broad context of the genetic, morphological, and behavioral variation that exists in the animal kingdom. —American Scientist; Biological anthropologist Robert Martin wields decades of research to get at the evolutionary facts and inform people's reproductive decisions.... Fascinating detours abound; such as the successful, and sensitive, toilet training of six-month-old babies by Kenya's Digo people. —Nature; A gold mine of cocktail party trivia.... People who are fascinated by humans' past should read this book. —Science News; Robert Martin is one of our leading researchers on human biology and evolution, having made a career of generating novel and game-changing conclusions about why our bodies and organs look the way they do. In *How We Do It*, he brings his authoritative voice to a compelling, readable, and enlightening account about human reproduction. Read Robert Martin and you will not look at human bodies the same way again. —Neil Shubin, paleontologist, The University of Chicago, and author of *Your Inner Fish*; *How We Do It* is a fascinating account of the natural history of human reproduction. As modern medicine and technology increasingly encroach on conception, childbirth, and infant care, it is eye-opening to learn about how these processes actually evolved in our species. Robert Martin has written the perfect birds-and-bees guide for curious grown-ups. —Lise Eliot, Associate Professor of Neuroscience, Chicago Medical School, Rosalind Franklin University, and author of *What's Going On In*

There?: How the Brain and Mind Develop in the First Five Years of Life"An accessible and affordable, yet rigorously reviewed, scholarly trade book that comes across as a career achievement. Buy it, read it, carefully consider it, and you will be on your way to becoming a cognoscenti in a diversity of fields related to humans and their evolution and reproductive biology.~ Evolutionary Psychology~ This fascinating, comprehensive look at human evolution raises important questions about what everything from bottle-fed babies to assisted reproduction means for the future of the species.... A must-read for anyone interested in human evolution.~ Booklist~ A fascinating treatment of a complex subject.~ Kirkus Reviews~ Martin, an anthropologist and curator at Chicago's Field Museum, covers every aspect of human reproduction~ from fertilization to infant care~ in this thoughtful, well-written book.... His comparative analysis and expertise permits him to draw compelling conclusions.... He also raises thought-provoking questions, such as why so many sperm~ on the order of 250 billion~ are released when only one can inseminate the egg.~ Publishers Weekly

Heard about this book in the Chicago Sun Times and thought it sounded interesting. Not being particularly scientifically literate, I decided it was probably above my pay-grade. I saw the author discussing the book on TV and changed my mind. He had a way of explaining things that made intuitive sense, so I thought I'd give it try. I'm so very glad that I did, an absolutely fascinating and highly accessible read. Interesting topics discussed herein: declining sperm counts, benefits of breastfeeding, contraceptives, potty training, etc. I recommend this book to anyone interested in human biology, human evolution, human reproduction, or interested in science generally. But no need for extensive scientific training, Martin has a way with words that makes complicated topics easy to follow and comprehend. For being as widely accessible as it is, his writing is not overly pedantic or condescending, just very informative and accessible. Those coming to the book with a some prior scientific training will also find plenty to enjoy as he seems to draw on a wide range of scientific research and methods from which to draw his conclusions. Best of all, he adds a bit of humor to boot.

And you'll wonder why you've never inquired about some BASIC FACTS about sexuality and the history of humans. The author is the kind of erudite, witty polymath you rarely find these days--curious about everything, rigorous in research, but definitely understanding that people need to know about the 18th-century Italian priest who put tight-fitting taffeta pants on frogs. (WHY put

tight-fitting taffeta pants on frogs??? Gentlemen, think how such pants might prevent your sperm from getting anywhere. Empirical study has to start somewhere.) There's lots of food for thought in this book for parents. But also for anyone who's, uh, ever been born from parents. And by "parents", think parents, parents, parents-- all the way back to early hominids, and back, back, back to ancestors who were the organisms who first invented sexual reproduction. The chapter on feeding babies was so interesting that I missed my train stop. Really, this book is engrossing. You'll never think about sexuality the same way again.

Not only is "How We Do It" packed full of things that everybody should know about human reproduction, but Martin compares all of it to what we know about procreation in other beloved mammals, like dogs and monkeys. Readers will be amazed by how much they did not know about baby-making, how much they assumed based on little evidence, and about how much we still don't know. And they'll be enthralled by Martin's fascinating questions--questions that they might never have even thought could be asked at all. I'll be recommending this book to students in my biological anthropology courses at the University of Rhode Island.

THE book on sexuality, from a biology/anthropology point of view. I didn't know many mammals have bones in their penis, did you? At times it is droll, a tad scientific, but hey, it is written by a scientist and he's found some things that most of us do not know about sexuality. Go figure! The scientific detail adds credibility. Hats off to Dr. Martin!

This is a compelling, interesting book that delivers a high level of information while being very readable and accessible. Highly recommended - you will learn many things about what it means to be born as a human and how we evolved to be who we are.

Martin raises the bar for scientists writing for a general reader on timely subjects. Conspicuously, he cites his sources -- who did what when -- forever removing doubt about the human effort going into science, in this case reproductive science. I can object to his definitions of conception and embryo, but I have no doubt about how he uses the terms and what he intends to convey by them. He might have drawn attention to the social importance of nursing and its potential evolutionary significance as an instrument of female bonding, but that may come in a second edition.

Book came in right on time and everything looks great.

Great

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