
What are Pregnancy & Childbearing like on Pern?

by Lynne Brigant

Although there are some herbal forms of birth control on Pern, these are not extremely reliable, and knowledge of them is often not common in holds and halls, where their use would be highly disapproved of anyway. For a married woman, it is her duty to provide her husband as many children as possible, and it is a mark of pride for both husband and wife to have numerous children. Few married holder or crafter women would have any desire to limit their childbearing capabilities, and unmarried women outside the Weyrs are not usually very free with their sexual favors (see "[Sexual Morality in Weyr, Hold, & Craft](#)").

Holdless traders, on the other hand, have an entirely different code of honor, and their womenfolk are not raised to protect their chastity at all costs. What is acceptable behavior may vary from one caravan to another, depending on the attitudes and opinion of the caravan leader, but generally speaking, caravan women are much more relaxed about such matters, and knowledge of and use of herbal birth control is common among the caravans. Nevertheless, these herbal methods are not always effective, and even a holdless trader will usually be expected to get herself a husband pretty quickly if she should wind up pregnant. It is only in the Weyr that abortion is considered acceptable.

Due to the fact that the Pernese calendar has 13 months, each consisting of exactly 28 days, pregnancy on Pern lasts ten months. Human gestation is generally between 38 - 42 weeks, and when the doctor tells you your due date, it's based on the assumption that the pregnancy will last 40 weeks. That would be ten Pernese months.

Due to their lesser medical knowledge, such things as cesarean sections are extremely rare and risky on Pern; indeed the Pernese tend to feel that any sort of invasive surgery is rather macabre. As a result, it is not at all unusual for women to die in childbirth. Because of the group living typical on Pern, it would be extremely rare for a woman to be in a situation where she didn't have other women available to assist during delivery. As a result, and because of the large families typical to Pern, most girls and women have had ample experience as midwives by the time they come to have children of their own. A midwife is not a trained crafter, though some who are particularly good at it may seek some healerhall craft training. The healerhall is one of the few crafts that is somewhat more open to accepting female apprentices, but even that craft has the typical Pernese gender prejudices, and a woman will very rarely achieve Master status. Indeed, she has to work three times as hard just to be granted her journeyman knots.

Pregnancy & The Dragonrider

Frequently going *between* often causes spontaneous miscarriages, which may very well occur before the rider was even aware she was pregnant. A miscarriage that happens within a week or two of conception is likely to result in nothing more than painful cramps and extra-heavy bleeding.

Because bearing a child has such an impact on the rider's ability to fight Thread during her term, abortion is not frowned upon in the Weyr, and a pregnant rider who does not wish to stay pregnant will often jump *between* several times until she aborts. The later she leaves this, however, the harder it is on her body. Even at only five or six weeks into gestation, doing this will probably land her in the Infirmary for several days. Much later than that, and it would become dangerous to her, and therefore, to her dragon. She would probably get in a lot of trouble if she vacillated about whether or not she was going to abort and then tried to do it too far into the pregnancy.

That situation likely would not arise, however, because with the closeknit nature of the Wings and the inevitability of gossip in a large group living situation like the Weyr, no pregnancy is going to remain unknown for long, and it is highly unlikely that a woman is going to be more than a month or so pregnant before she becomes aware of it. Once the Wingleader is aware that one of his riders is pregnant, he will immediately arrange for her transfer to the Queen's Wing (whether she wants to or not). Because the Queen's Wing fights on the lowest level, they hardly ever need to drop *between*, so there is less chance of spontaneous abortion. If the rider particularly wants to bear the child, however, and particularly if she has had several miscarriages or a problem pregnancy before, she may wish not to risk it at all, and she may then seek the Weyrwoman's permission to be excused from Threadfighting altogether, either during her whole pregnancy or at least during the risky first trimester. At any point in the pregnancy, as well, the Weyrhealer may ground the rider if he/she deems it appropriate.

The first trimester is the most risky for miscarriage. During the second trimester, if there is no difficulty, the rider may have several options. With the approval of the Weyrwoman, the Weyrhealer and her Wingleader, she may either continue to sit out Threadfall if she was already doing so, remain in the Queen's Wing, or even return to her regular Wing (however, few Wingleaders are comfortable with this idea, and it is rare). During the last trimester, she is probably getting too big to fit comfortably between her dragon's neckridges, particularly if she rides a green, and she often begins her maternity leave at that point.

The Weyrwoman is responsible for arranging foster care, and no dragonrider has the time to be a full-time mother. She may still be involved in her child's life, similar to the Earth mother who works full-time, but sees her child in the evenings and on weekends (but it would be the responsibility of the foster mother to get up with the child in the night when necessary, etc.). Or, if she has no maternal



instincts, she may choose to be entirely uninvolved with the child.

The rider may choose to take care of her baby herself during the first six weeks of its life, when she is not yet healed enough to return to Threadfighting anyway, including breastfeeding if she so chooses. Or she may choose to hand total or partial care over to the foster mother immediately. All Pernese babies are breastfed. If someone is for some reason unable to breastfeed their infant, another woman will act as milkmother to the child. Human females are capable of producing breastmilk from the time they have their first child right through the entire rest of their life (even after menopause), providing they never stop. (My mother told me about a documentary she saw set in, I think, Mexico, in which there was a group of women, several of them quite old, who were passing babies around and all of them breastfeeding, so it can be done. It is even possible to breastfeed if you never had a baby, but it is very difficult to get it started.)