Go to the next page to read the excerpt or click on the book cover above for more info!

THIS IS YOUR FIRST TEST

You probably don't remember the first test you took. You didn't study and there wasn't a private prep class for it. You were one minute old. No number-two pencils, no fancy equipment. Just five simple observations recorded by a doctor. It's possible this test even saved your life.

This test is now commonly known as the Apgar score, an easy and objective method for evaluating a newborn's health just moments after birth. It is simple, noninvasive and has saved innumerable infants' lives around the world.

Virginia Apgar was a medical maverick. She was one of the first women ever to graduate with an M.D. from Columbia University, in 1933. In 1939 she became the first woman to head a department at Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons, and in 1949 she became the first woman to be granted a full professorship in anesthesiology at the university.

As a result of the post–World War II baby boom and a social shift away from home births, significantly more babies were now

being delivered in hospitals. Originally, a baby would be born, quickly cleaned, swaddled, and sent off to the nursery. It was assumed that an infant was in good health unless obvious symptoms of illness were visible. As a result, many respiratory or circulatory problems were not detected. Many infant deaths could have been prevented had there been a method for diagnosing a newborn's health.

After years of evaluating newborns soon after their births during her research as a perinatal anesthesiologist, Dr. Apgar wrote, "Birth is the most hazardous time of life." In response, she created a simple yet accurate assessment tool for evaluating a baby's health during the crucial minutes after birth, when diagnosis and intervention could help save its life. This "Newborn Scoring System" is now the international standard for evaluating a baby at birth.

The Newborn Scoring System assigns a maximum score of 2 points each to five criteria: heart rate, respiratory rate, reflex irritability (response to physical stimulation), muscle tone, and color. Assessment of each of these criteria is made twice, at one and five minutes after birth. A score of at least 7 on both assessments indicates a high likelihood of a healthy baby. Lower scores indicate problems that need to be diagnosed and, if necessary, treated immediately. To further simplify this evaluation, the acronym "APGAR" was developed by another physician to make the five criteria easier to learn and remember. The Apgar score, as the test is now commonly referred to, stands for (A) appearance; (P) Pulse; (G) grimace; (A) activity; (R) respiratory.

As a colleague of Apgar's observed, "Every baby born in a modern hospital anywhere in the world is now looked at first through the eyes of Virginia Apgar." The Apgar score has made a worldwide impact on saving babies' lives. It costs nothing, is simple to teach, and requires no complex technology. It took a lot of experience and common sense to create something so simple and streamlined. Yet the Apgar score has changed the world of perinatal care. No marketing budget, no technology, no charge. Just profound worldwide impact.

Sometimes you find remarkable innovations in the places you least expect.