



Healthy Lifestyle

# Infant and toddler health

**Becoming a new dad can bring joy — and stress. Find out how to deal with the difficulties of parenthood and develop a rewarding relationship with your newborn.**

By Mayo Clinic Staff

Becoming a new dad can be an exciting and overwhelming experience. But you can take steps to prepare for the emotions and challenges of fatherhood so that it's less stressful and more fulfilling.

No one said taking care of a newborn would be easy. As a new dad, you might worry about:

- **Limited paternity leave.** If you aren't able to take time off when the baby is born, it might be difficult to keep up your regular work schedule and find time to spend with your newborn.
- **New responsibilities.** Newborns require constant care. On top of feedings, diaper changes and crying spells, parents must find time to do household chores and other activities. This can be stressful for new parents who are used to a more independent lifestyle.
- **Disrupted sleep.** Newborns challenge their parents' ability to get a good night's sleep. Sleep deprivation can quickly take a toll on new parents.
- **Financial strain.** The cost of your baby's delivery, health care, diapers, clothing and other supplies can add up quickly. The financial strain might be worse if you move to a bigger home or pay someone to take care of the baby while you work — or you or your partner takes unpaid leave or quits work to take care of the baby.
- **Less time with your partner.** Having a baby means sharing your partner's attention with a third party. It's common for a new dad to feel left out.
- **Loss of sexual activity.** Recovery from childbirth, physical exhaustion and stress can take a toll on your sex life, which might strain your relationship.
- **Depression.** Research shows that some fathers — like mothers — experience depression shortly after a child's birth.

If your partner is still pregnant, ease any anxiety by actively preparing for fatherhood. As a new dad, you can:

- **Get involved.** During pregnancy, men don't experience the same daily reminders that they're about to become parents as do women. Placing your hand on your partner's belly to feel the

baby kick, attending prenatal visits and talking about the pregnancy with others can help you feel involved. You can also talk, read or sing near your partner's belly so that your baby will recognize your voice after birth.

- **Attend prenatal classes.** Prenatal classes can help you and your partner find out what to expect during labor and delivery, as well as learn how to take care of a newborn.
- **Consult a financial planner.** Talking to a financial planner can help you determine ways to handle the cost of having a baby.
- **Build a network of social support.** During pregnancy, your partner might get support from health care providers, loved ones and friends. It's important for men to have a support network during this time, too. Seek out friends and loved ones who can give you advice and encouragement as you prepare to become a father.
- **Talk to your partner.** Talk about how your daily lives and relationship might change — for better and for worse — once the baby is born.
- **Consider what kind of father you want to be.** Think about your own father. Consider what aspects of that relationship you might want to emulate with your own child and what you might do differently.

Once your baby is born, look for ways to connect with your newly expanded family. As a new dad, you can:

- **Room with your family at the hospital.** If the hospital allows, stay with your partner and newborn until it's time to take the baby home.
- **Take turns caring for the baby.** Take turns feeding and changing the baby. If your partner is breast-feeding, offer to bottle-feed pumped breast milk — or burp the baby and put him or her to sleep after breast-feeding sessions.
- **Play with the baby.** Women tend to provide low-key, soothing stimulation for their babies, and men often engage their babies in noisier, more vigorous activities. Both styles of play are important, and seeing your newborn smile can be its own reward.
- **Be affectionate with your partner.** Intimacy isn't limited to sex. Hugs, kisses and shoulder rubs can help you stay connected while your partner recovers from childbirth and both of you adjust to the new routine. Continue talking to your partner about the changes you're experiencing and how you can support each other as your baby grows.
- **Seek help.** If you're having trouble dealing with changes in your relationship or you think you might be depressed, talk to a counselor or other mental health provider. You can also talk to your baby's doctor and ask for a referral. Untreated depression affects the entire family.

Becoming a new dad is a life-changing experience. By recognizing and planning for the challenges ahead, you can ease your stress and spend more time enjoying your new family.

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