

Tips for First-time Fathers

So you're going to be a dad. Congratulations! You may not be going through the morning sickness, ice cream cravings and weight gain, but you probably are counting down the days until the birth, helping get the baby's room ready and thinking about buying a tiny baseball glove. Then the panic hits. You've never done this before. How will you know how to take care of a newborn?

Take a deep breath and relax. Babies are not breakable. They may not smell like a rose when they have a dirty diaper, but they really are quite sturdy. So don't be afraid to hold your baby. Ask a doctor, nurse, relative or friend to show you some good holds for newborns. Remember all those hours you spent on the baseball field throwing, catching and hitting? Practice makes perfect. The same holds true in caring for an infant. The more often you change a diaper, give a bottle or soothe a crying baby, the better you will be.

Safety is important. You do need to ensure that you support the baby's head and neck. Under no circumstances should you shake a baby or young child as this may result in brain injury. Avoid rough play including throwing an infant in the air or bouncing the baby on your knee. You also need to learn how to properly secure an infant seat in your vehicle and make certain that the infant is securely fastened.

The only thing you cannot do is breastfeed. But while the mother is feeding the baby, you can still help. Since babies typically go through three to four outfits a day, you can take care of a load or two of laundry. You also tidy up around the house and even cook (or order in) a few meals. If family and friends want to bring over food, take them up on their offers. Until you settle into a regular schedule, both parents may feel too tired to cook.

To give your partner a break, offer to take the baby for the day so she can rest and catch up on her sleep. This also gives you some one-on-one bonding time with your baby, and your little one will enjoy the stimulation of a change of scenery or activity. Just remember that things take longer with a baby, so plan your schedule accordingly and make time for diaper changes, bottle feedings and naps.

If your baby is crying, he is trying to communicate with you the only way he can. Listen. It won't take long for you to know your baby's different cries when he is wet, hungry or sick. Call the pediatrician with questions or concerns about your baby's health, especially if he has a fever over 100 degrees, cries persistently for no apparent reason or if you feel there may be a serious health problem.

And last but not least, take care of yourself. Follow a healthy diet, don't smoke and don't take unnecessary risks. Take a paternity leave or use vacation time to spend as much

quality dad time as you can with your baby. Talk with other fathers about their experiences. You can learn a lot from them, like keeping your chest hair covered because babies like to pull it out. You'll find that time flies after your baby is born and on your first Father's Day you will proudly wear your favorite tee shirt, the one that says "World's Greatest Dad."