

Looking After the New Parent



The First **26** Weeks

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Welcoming a new baby into the family is one of life's major delights.

This handy brochure contains lots of practical, useful and trustworthy information to help new parents settle into their new life.

It has been prepared with the guidance and assistance of healthcare professionals. However, if you are concerned about your health or that of your baby, please consult your doctor.



Parenting

As you prepare to become a parent, you'll know that having a baby is a life changer - and it's certainly a wonderfully rewarding one! For people who have led active and organised lives, the unpredictability of parenting can take a little getting used to. But a simple adjustment of your expectations of yourself will help smooth the way.

Many parents, particularly in the early days of baby coming home, find that a good way to manage is to first decide what is important then make a priority list of what has to be done each day. And, of course, gratefully accept any reasonable offers of support.

Naturally no-one can control their baby's behaviour or their responses to care - so do your best, ask for help when needed - and don't feel guilty!

You'll also be meeting many other parents along the way, and sharing your experiences can build solid friendships. You may also become a great source of support to each other.

Looking After Yourself

A vital first step towards caring for your baby is to look after yourself. However, many parents place their own needs low on the family priority scale instead of considering themselves as important as everyone else. With a new baby, it's essential to ensure you're in good health, physically and mentally.

Physical Wellbeing

- **Recover.** It can take six weeks to bounce back to normal after a vaginal birth and longer after a caesarian, so give your body adequate time to heal, restore and adapt. Try to avoid unessential projects in the early months after having a baby.
- **Sleep.** Take a nap when you can, because disrupted night time sleep can be a fact in early parenting. It may be six months or more before night feeds phase out, so daytime sleeps, especially in the early months, can be very beneficial.

- **Rest.** Don't underestimate the benefits of resting. Avoid seeing the times when your baby is settled as an opportunity to do household tasks. Even putting your feet up and reading for 30 minutes will help you to conserve energy and feel refreshed.
- **Exercise.** Aim to walk 30-40 minutes on most days. Fresh air and exercise do wonders for revitalising a tired, stressed mind, so try to get out regularly for a walk, pushing the pram as you go. Most babies really enjoy the outing, too! Exercise stimulates endorphins - your 'feel good' or 'happy' hormones, which in turn will help you make better food choices as well as assist in gradual weight loss.

Like any form of exercise, the more you do the more benefit you'll feel. Don't forget your pelvic floor exercises, which are also important after pregnancy and childbirth. Start slowly and aim to increase your repetitions to three times each day.

- **Appearance.** While it is tempting sometimes to stay in your comfy pyjamas, freshening up with a shower, popping on some clean clothes and cleaning your teeth are guaranteed to give you a lift. And you'll also be more prepared for any unexpected visitors!

Psychological Wellbeing

A new baby brings so much joy to parents, family and friends. It is such a special time, filled with love, happy surprises, new experiences and satisfaction. It's not just baby who is growing and developing - it's you and everyone close to them too.

- Put time into planning the birth, including what you'll need with you and at home. Of course, birth plans are not a guarantee or a prediction of how a birth will proceed, and some delivery experiences can be different to what was hoped, but you'll feel more comfortable knowing you've organised what you could in advance.
- It is normal for new mothers to sometimes feel overwhelmed by their emotions. Some mothers may even feel teary and sad. Hormonal fluctuations, tiredness and the responsibility of caring for a new baby can naturally contribute to mood swings.

- **Post Natal Depression.** Both women and men may feel a little blue after the excitement and activity surrounding the birth of a baby. However there is a more severe depression called Post Natal Depression (PND) that can last for a week or more post-birth. This can affect regular routines and the day to day caring for a baby. Unfortunately one in seven women experience some degree of this debilitating condition.

Symptoms of PND can vary and can include feeling very flat with little energy, not being able to sleep even when the opportunity exists, appetite changes resulting in weight loss or gain, an overwhelming feeling of anxiety, or confusing feelings toward their newborn.

Should this be your situation, do speak with your family, early childhood nurse, midwife or general practitioner. Treatment options are available to support and assist you.



Nutritional Wellbeing

With all the new routines that life with a baby brings, it's imperative to remember to eat well. A balanced diet can give you essential energy and nutrients you'll need.

- Variety is the spice of life. Aim for a daily selection of different foods from each food group to provide interest and variety, and to help meet your increased nutritional requirements.
- Aim for at least two and a half serves of low fat dairy foods (milk, yoghurt, cheese or custard) or calcium-enriched soy or rice milk. This will help you meet your calcium recommended dietary intake of 1000mg or more per day (women 19-50 years).
- The Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) recommends two serves of fruit and five serves of vegetables or salad every day to give you plenty of fibre, vitamins and minerals.
 - One serve is a cup of salad, a medium piece of fruit or half a cup of cooked vegetables
 - Include fruit with edible skin such as grapes, pears, apples and strawberries as these provide more fibre, which can be especially helpful for reducing the risk of constipation. If constipation occurs, see your GP.
- Choose wholegrain or wholemeal breads, cereals, crackers, pasta and rice as these are all an excellent source of carbohydrates that have a low glycaemic index (GI) which gives sustained energy
- Include a serve of lean meat, chicken, fish or legumes (such as chickpeas or baked beans) at both lunch and dinner meals to help meet your protein needs and provide you with essential iron for stamina and a healthy immune system
- Remember to drink water regularly, especially in warmer climates or if you are breastfeeding. Having a glass of water regularly will help maintain hydration and help prevent constipation.

Additional nutritional tips for breastfeeding

While breastfeeding you have a greater need for some nutrients including energy, protein, zinc and vitamin C.

- You may experience an increase in your appetite when the demands of breastfeeding require more energy and nourishment. Make sure you eat enough to satisfy this. Eating a healthy snack such as fresh fruit and yoghurt or wholegrain crackers and cheese in between your main meals will help.
- The effects of alcohol while breastfeeding is still actively debated by many in the medical field. Not drinking alcohol is considered the safest option, however if you choose to enjoy a drink, it is recommended to delay it to at least one month after delivery and consume no more than two standard drinks per day¹.

Weight management

While most women aim to return to their pre-pregnancy weight as soon as possible, the key is to try to achieve this slowly. Aim for around 500g to 1kg loss per week.

Here are some recommendations:

- Rapid weight loss does not necessarily mean fat loss and may be detrimental to your health. With many new things to adjust to (including broken sleep), weight loss may not be a high priority for now.
- Eat small amounts of nutritious foods often to boost your energy levels and keep blood sugar levels stable while encouraging weight loss. Eating small amounts regularly often fits in better with baby's demands, too.
- Aim to eat six small meals or snacks a day instead of just two or three. Choose slow-release carbohydrates such as wholegrain breads and cereals, including fruits (leave the edible skin on for extra fibre), low fat smoothies, wholegrain crackers with avocado or hommus and vegetable soups.

- Limit fat intake especially saturated fat, choose reduced or low fat dairy products. Your Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) or doctor can give you more detailed information on how to do this.
- Snacking on foods such as chips, chocolate, lollies or fried foods may quickly satisfy your hunger. However, these foods provide little essential nutrients for your body and are high in kilojoules, fat, salt and sugar. To ensure that you have plenty of convenient nutritious meals and snacks at easy reach, see the handy hints over the page.
- Non-strenuous exercise, including walking with bub, is critical not only to help you get back to your pre-pregnancy weight, but also to gain some fresh air. Find an activity that you enjoy and that suits your new lifestyle, and start slowly. Remember that it is important to consult your doctor before recommencing strenuous exercise after the birth of your baby.
- If you have concerns regarding your weight or have other special dietary needs, consult an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) or GP for advice to suit your individual situation.

Nutritional handy hints

1. Before the birth, prepare meals and freeze them into individual serves. These can be reheated when time is limited or you don't have the energy to cook. Healthy meal options you can consider include spaghetti bolognese, stir fries, hearty soups, pasta bakes or vegetable frittatas.
2. When you find time to cook in the first few weeks, make double quantities. For instance, make two home-made pizzas and freeze one for the family for later.
3. Remember you are not expected to be superwoman and do everything! It's ok to accept any offers of a home cooked meal or a snack.
4. For quick and easy snacks, keep at hand plenty of fresh fruit, dried fruit, nuts, reduced or low fat yoghurt and milk, low fat dips and breads, including fruit breads

- 5.** Trips to the supermarket can sometimes be a juggle, so to ensure you always have a range of healthy, fresh foods at home, consider asking friends and family to help by picking up groceries before they visit you. Alternatively, consider purchasing groceries online and having them home delivered for a small fee.
- 6.** If it is hard to find adequate time to feed yourself, try making baby's feed time your snack time. Nibble a piece of fruit such as a banana or grapes, sip on a smoothie, or munch on some fruit bread while giving baby his or her feed.
- 7.** Convenience is essential, especially in the first few months when you are home with your new baby. Healthy frozen meals, frozen vegetables, pre-prepared salad packs, tubs of chopped fruit, single serve tubs of yoghurt or ready to drink low-fat flavoured milks and smoothies are available in most supermarkets.
- 8.** While your new routines are being established, you may find that repetitive meals work better. Have a few simple meals in your repertoire that can be thrown together easily. This will save you from falling into the unhealthy take-away trap.



Relationship Health

While everyone's focus is naturally on the baby, remember to actively nurture and maintain the health of those other important relationships around you.

- Even the most creative people cannot truly appreciate how much one small child will change their lives. After a new baby is born, it may take months before a family feels it is balanced again.
- Some pregnant women have concerns that they won't love their new baby as much as their older children. Try not to worry. Nature has designed babies to be very skillful in helping their parents fall in love with them!
- With so much focus on the new baby – photos, gifts, enquiries and visitors – it's natural that siblings could feel left out. So include them in pictures of baby – and by themselves as well, and make sure you give some regular, individual attention to those siblings.
- If an older child is vying for attention when you are attending to baby's needs, gently make it clear that you know it is hard to wait, then give that child some love and help as soon as you're finished
- You may find that your partner 'parents' a little differently to you, but together you are providing your child with equally valuable experiences. Keep communication open about this significant aspect of bringing up your baby.
- Discussing finances can be a touchy point for many people, but babies can attract a fair amount of expense and budgeting becomes a fact of life for most parents. A good starting point is to try to separate legitimate 'need to have' from 'want to have' items.

- Try not to always see yourself only in terms of being a parent. Routinely make some time to enjoy something else which gives you pleasure. While babies initially can consume a lot of time and energy, with time they do become more predictable. Then you'll find it easier to plan for some activities not purely devoted to them.
- Remember that every baby and family is unique, and what works for some may not work for others. When you look after yourself, you are valuing the most important person in your child's world and that's always going to be worthwhile.

For other information
specific to your baby's age,
visit www.meandmychild.com.au



Our special thanks to Jane Barry, Registered Nurse, Midwife and Child Health Nurse and Kate DiPrima, Accredited Practicing Dietitian for their contribution to this brochure, based on her experience and professional knowledge (March 2015)

Important Statement:

Breastfeeding is the normal method of infant feeding, and is best for babies. It has benefits for the infant, such as reducing infection risk, and for the mother. It is important to have a healthy balanced diet in preparation for, and during breastfeeding. Infant formula is designed to replace breast milk when an infant is not breastfed.

Breastfeeding can be negatively affected by introducing partial bottle-feeding, and reversing a decision not to breastfeed is difficult. Infant formula must be prepared and used as directed. Unnecessary or improper use of infant formula, such as not properly boiling water or sterilising feeding equipment, may make your baby ill. Social and financial implications, including preparation time and the cost of formula, should be considered when selecting a method of infant feeding.



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