

SIXTEEN THINGS FATHERS CAN DO TO SUPPORT THEIR PREGNANT PARTNERS

1. Go with your partner to her prenatal visits. The baby's heart starts beating 22 days after conception, or the fifth week of pregnancy, and you can hear it with an ultrasound anywhere between the seventh and twelfth weeks.
2. During the second trimester, go with your partner if she needs an ultrasound. You can see the baby's head, arms, hands, legs, and feet. You may even find out the sex of the baby. During the third trimester, ask how you can help during the delivery.
3. Watch videotapes, listen to audiotapes, check out the Internet, or read books about prenatal development, birthing, and becoming a parent.
4. Help plan for the baby. Talk with your partner about what you both want for your baby. Ask friends and family members if you can borrow a crib, changing table, or baby clothes. Many people are glad to let you use their things. Save a little money each week. It will make it easier once the baby arrives.
5. Go to classes that will teach you and your partner about childbirth.
6. Help your partner stay healthy during pregnancy. Help her eat many different foods. Watch what you eat too. If you eat right, you will make it easier for her. Help your partner stay away from alcohol. Alcohol can cause birth defects. Encourage her to drink juice or milk.
7. Help your partner stay away from street drugs. If you use illegal drugs, stop now, and if your partner uses them, get help for her. Also, encourage her to check with the doctor before taking any over-the-counter drugs or prescription drugs.
8. Make sure your partner stays away from dangerous household products. Strong cleansers, paint products, and insecticides can all harm your baby. Do not let her empty the cat litter box.
9. Exercise during pregnancy. Walk or swim together. Both are safe exercises and provide time together.
10. Be sure your partner gets enough rest. Help with the household chores. Encourage her to use relaxation exercises and join in. Stress can be very harmful to both mother and baby. Talk out differences in a supportive way. If you find yourself becoming angry and having difficulty controlling negative feelings, seek out counseling. Never use physical force, intimidation, belittling comments, or other abusive behaviors. These are not productive for any relationship and are especially harmful during pregnancy.
11. Understand the different changes both you and your partner are going through as you prepare for parenthood. Pregnancy causes many changes in how a woman feels about how her body is changing. You can still have sex. Talk to each other about what feels good.
12. Support your partner's choice on how to feed the baby. Breast milk is best for the baby. If mom chooses bottle feeding, you can often take over the feeding of the baby and give mom a rest. Even if breast feeding, mom can pump milk into a bottle, which will allow your participation in the feeding of the baby.
13. To attach with your baby, take time to learn about the developmental stages and how nutrition, lifestyles, and stress can affect prenatal growth. Listen to your child's heartbeat, feel the kicks. From the second trimester on, you can play the "tapping" game. Each time the mother feels the unborn baby kick, you can respond by tapping her stomach in the same area. The unborn baby quickly learns this "call and response" game. Talk and sing to your baby. Direct positive thoughts and loving feelings to your unborn child. Visualize yourself holding, touching, rocking, or talking to your child. Think about the kind of father you want to be to your child.
14. Find an infant massage class and attend with your partner. Infant massage is a wonderful way to soothe a baby.

15. Learn how to bathe, feed, diaper, hold, and comfort a baby. All of these activities will build a father's confidence and enhance bonding with the child.

16. Find a "New Fathers" support group or talk to other men who have had or are going to have new babies. Share feelings, ideas on supporting the pregnant mom, and tips to make sure you are taking care of yourself.

17. As soon as the baby is born, hold the baby and look into the baby's eyes. If you talked to the baby before he or she was born, speak to him or her at birth, then he or she will probably recognize your voice.

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Adapted by K. Thompson from: Rosenberg, J. & Wilcox., W.B. (2006). The Importance Of Fathers In The Healthy Development Of Children US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, Office on Child Abuse and Neglect