

TIPS FOR DADS: CARING FOR NEW MOMS

The first few weeks home with a new baby are often full of doubt, sleep deprivation, and frustration, with unpredictable moments of joy when the baby goes to sleep. It gets a lot better. It is generally worse for Mom. She is recovering from birth and a C-section, riding an emotional and physical roller-coaster, trying to breast-feed a screaming infant she may believe she is starving, and has little experienced help.

Life as she knew it has evaporated. Her routine and support structure is gone. She may feel trapped. Under the best of circumstances, she may get no more than a few hours rest a day. Exhausted and overwhelmed, she is also expected to know and do everything that the baby needs due to her “maternal instinct”. Talk about a setup! She may believe she is supposed to know it all, but may feel overwhelmed and lost.

Reassure her that you are in it together, and you will get through it together. Be positive, constructive, encouraging, and help build her confidence.

The following is standard advice for fathers for the first week at home:

- Quickly learn to change diapers, burp, and calm your crying baby by jumping in from the start. Show mom she can count on you.
- Coordinate any help. Obtain what is needed from family, friends, or neighbors, and make sure it is actually helpful.
- Keep necessary resources available, including phone numbers of doctors, the hospital, and helpful books, and use them.
- Tell her she is doing great and will be a wonderful mom.
- Help her get some sleep, and try to get some yourself.

Pitch in as much as possible. In the middle of the night when the baby is crying and both of you are dead tired, reach deep and find the strength to get up and handle the baby. Sleep will do her good.

On occasion, when your baby is calm, remind her of the miracle that she brought into your world. Together, check out your baby’s fingers, toes, and nose, and talk of the future—your child’s first date, first day at school and of course, the first time he sleeps through the night.

Some new moms totally thrive like they were born to be a mom. Some babies sleep through the night right off and rarely cry. If so, enjoy, but do not count on it. Be aware that “natural” moms and calm babies need just as much from dad, so do not be left out.

More than any other issue, veteran dads stress the importance of taking care of new moms. When you are dog tired and perhaps taking heat for not being perfect, being kind and patient with mom can be trying. Down the road, however, when you look back, you will want to know you were up to it, and you will want her to know too. Often the little things count the most. “Nice job, Mom” when your baby goes to sleep after being fussy.

The impromptu backrub that feels good and leaves mom feeling loved and appreciated.

Boot Camp for New Dads. (2003). *Caring for new moms* [On-line]. Available: <http://www.newdads.com/CaringMom.htm>. 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