

You're a New Mom! Now What?

Let's face it. Nothing really prepares you for parenthood. No matter how much babysitting you've done, how much time you've spent caring for siblings, nieces or nephews, how many parenting books you've read, or how many puppies you may have raised.

The good news is that, if you can work at being flexible and willing to seek out and accept help from others, you will be much happier and more successful in navigating these somewhat uncharted waters.

1 Protect Your Health

Taking care of your health is an important aspect of being a new parent. The health of your entire family depends on it. Be sure to follow up with your doctor regarding



any conditions you may have dealt with during pregnancy (diabetes, high blood pressure, etc.). Concentrate on getting adequate nutrition, especially if you are nursing, and don't worry about getting back into your skinny jeans just yet. It took time to put on your baby weight. Expect the same amount of time to take it off.

2 Set Boundaries

Everyone loves a new baby, and well-meaning family, friends and other visitors will want to come over to see your little one right away. Don't be afraid to politely ask them to give you a couple weeks first. This will give you time to rest up and get your house in order, and it will also give you and the baby time to get acclimated to your new routine.

3 Fight Fatigue

Sleep deprivation combined with the constant demands of caring for a baby can really take their toll in the first few weeks. Even showering and getting dressed may seem beyond your grasp at times. Although a certain amount of fatigue is inevitable, chronic sleep deprivation can lead to exhaustion and interfere with your memory, mood, concentration and ability to cope. It can also lower your resistance to illness.

Try to sleep whenever the baby sleeps. Even a 15 to 20 minute nap can be a pick-me-up. If you can, divide up the night shift with your spouse or a partner. Only one person gets up with the baby at a time, and, if necessary, takes the baby to an area where crying won't disturb your sleeping mate.

4 Nurish Yourself

Yes, there will be times when you feel too busy or exhausted to eat, but it's vital that you get the proper nutrition. Set up a regimen of feeding both you and your baby about every three hours.

For the baby, developing this routine can help eliminate a lot of fussiness and subsequent gas. Moms will benefit from eating several small healthy meals a day with improved energy, fewer cravings and potential for healthy weight loss.



When possible, eat before or while you feed the baby. It will give you energy, which will help better equip you to handle stressful situations and it helps establish the habit of a specific mealtime that baby will take into toddlerhood.

Another way to alleviate the stress of mealtime is to plan ahead when you can, making bottles in advance and scheduling your day around feeding times. If possible, hold your baby while you feed him or her and focus on being calm. You will find that these few precious minutes of bonding time will help you both relax.

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5 Enjoy Some Me Time

Your own needs don't disappear when you have a baby. If you're a conscientious parent, you may feel the need to totally suppress a yearning for some self-nurturing. Don't. It's not only okay, it's important to spend at least a couple hours each week away from mommy duty.

Work out. Read a book. Get a pedicure. Have lunch with a girlfriend. Whatever relaxes you and recharges your batteries is a necessary item on a new mom's itinerary. You must take care of yourself in order to properly care for your child.

6 Chill Out

Every new mother has at least one of those "What have I gotten myself into?" moments. It doesn't make you a bad parent. It makes you normal. Just keep reminding yourself that it will get better and hang in there until it does.

The more goal-oriented you are, the harder you may find the transition to motherhood. Accepting that you likely won't get through your daily "to do" list will help alleviate a lot of stress.

When you're having one of those days when your feelings of frustration or overwhelm are mounting out of control, place the baby safely in its crib, quietly leave the room and take a break for a few minutes to work through your feelings of anxiety or stress.

Try taking a deep breath and counting to 10, which has actually been proven to help bring down your heart rate and relieve tension.

If this doesn't work or it's been an especially rough few days, consider calling a friend or relative to spend the afternoon with you and the baby. It will give them a chance to enjoy some personal time with your little one and allow you to take a nap or indulge in a nice long bath.

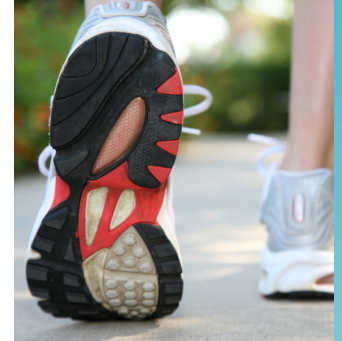
Yoga and meditation are other relaxation techniques you may find helpful. Classes are often offered by the local park district or the hospital where you gave birth. Consider infant massage, which can be very relaxing for both parent and baby. It's also a great way to get out and connect with other new mothers.

7 Get Moving

Exercise is a great stress reliever, yet it's often one of the hardest things for a new mom to fit in her day.

It's common for parents with newborns to isolate themselves indoors for days at a time. Taking your baby for a walk in the stroller is simple to do and great for relieving tension. The fresh air and sunshine will also do you both good. Consider heading over to the nearest mall if it's too cold outside.

If you're looking for alternative forms of exercise, check with your doctor, local park district or health club for classes or groups you can join along with your baby. It will get you out of the house, allow you to meet other moms, and get that needed stress release while still taking care of your little one.



8 Accept Assistance

Don't be afraid to ask for and accept help from family and friends with household chores, grocery shopping or watching the baby while you shower, nap or just relax on the couch.

Overwhelm from the daily chores of new motherhood can increase the risk of postpartum depression. If family, friends or neighbors can't help out, consider seeking help from a local faith-based organization or hiring someone for a few hours a week.

9 Seek Help for Depression

It's normal to feel sad, weepy and out of sorts for two or three weeks after the baby's birth. However, if you are still crying daily several weeks later, you may need to see a doctor for a postpartum depression evaluation.

There is no shame in seeking help for your feelings, and there are a variety of anti-depressants that are safe to take while breastfeeding. See a doctor at once if you have any thoughts of suicide or harming yourself or your baby.

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10 **Nurture Your Partner Relationship**

It's easy to get so involved with baby care that your relationship with your spouse or partner begins to suffer. It is important that you not allow this to happen. Staying close emotionally to your mate is vital to your physical and mental health, and the example you two set of a strong relationship is one of the best gifts you can give your child.

Family members or friends would likely relish the opportunity to enjoy time with your little one. Even if you have to hire a babysitter, do whatever it takes for the two of you to spend an evening out alone at least once a month.

11 **Connect with Other Adults**

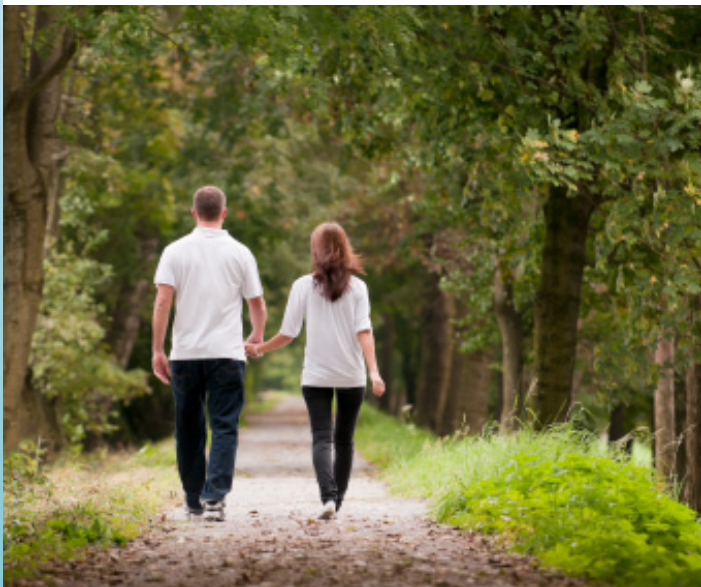
Finding opportunities to interact with other adults, especially new parents who can relate to your situation, will give you an emotional support system that will help prevent feelings of isolation and depression.

Get to know other parents in your neighborhood or find a support group in your community that fits your situation (working parents, stay-at-home moms, single parents, etc). Online support groups are also good, but nothing replaces the emotional support of a caring smile or a warm hug. It's also an opportunity for you to support other new parents.



12 **Keep Things in Perspective**

We all strive to develop a home that is positive, nurturing and a great example for our children, but don't forget that parenting is a process. You will have many successes and failures along the way. Be kind to yourself. Learn from but try not to linger on your mistakes.



Baby Product Experts specialty stores provide safe, high-quality products and expert advice.