

Hey Dad

Fatherhood - First 12 Months



HeyDadWA
Ngala
Parenting with Confidence



beyondblue
the national depression initiative

The pregnancy and birth

Many people describe it as a roller coaster ride, which is exciting and scary at the same time.

No matter how fatherhood is described, it is an adventure that can be both demanding and rewarding.



Pregnancy, the birth and the first year after the birth of a baby can be very challenging for dads and mums. New fathers who have been part of the birth process report a range of experiences – from being the greatest experience in their life, to horror at seeing their partner in extreme pain.

New fathers often have strong thoughts and feelings about the birth process, which they may not tell anyone about. These thoughts and feelings can be intensified if the birth did not go as planned or there are difficulties for the mother or baby.





After the birth

Most new parents feel a bit 'all over the place' after the birth. They often feel excited about the new baby, but overwhelmed and exhausted by the birth. This mixture of thoughts and feelings can be confusing. This is normal and it is helpful to get some rest when possible.

Think about your supports

Who can you ask for advice and practical support when the baby is born? This can include shopping, meals preparation, and care of other children. Why not check it out now so that your plan is ready to go when you leave hospital.

If you are planning on being with your partner for the birth of your baby, it is worth being prepared, as it can be a pretty tough experience.

Organising Time Off Work

1. Discuss with partner.
2. Discuss with employer.
3. Decide about how much time you will take off work during and after the birth.

Remember to consider that you may want or need to extend your leave after the birth.

The following is a list of things some dads have found useful:

Dad's hospital kit – what to bring

1. Camera ready to go.
2. A supply of energy food and drinks.
3. Something to read, pack of cards and music to help pass the time if it is slow going.
4. Clean clothes, tooth brush, toiletries, medication and glasses.
5. Loose change for vending machines, telephone and parking.
6. A note pad and pen.
7. Baby capsule with anchor points securely fitted in car.



Welcome to fatherhood

Fathers handling their baby

Some dads think that their partners are much better at baby-handling skills such as changing nappies, bathing and settling them to sleep.

Could this be because your partner has more opportunity to practise these skills? This is why it is so important for you to be involved in all of these activities.

Each of you will handle your baby differently.

- Differences in handling have a positive influence on brain development.
- Differences can result in improved co-ordination, which can be beneficial in physical development and sporting skills.
- Dad's involvement is important in the development of bonding between father and child.
- Sharing the load allows each of you to have a break.

Many dads feel a sense of relief that the ordeal is over and they have a chance to rest. Some are starting to think about the responsibility that lies ahead as a parent.

If you are feeling overwhelmed by the responsibility, talk to your partner, a friend, or a relative who has children and knows what you are talking about. Alternatively, contact your local parenting support organisation.





Help your baby to learn

From the first day your newborn baby comes into the world, he/she is ready to interact with you and has a lot to learn. They can recognise faces, see colours, hear voices, discriminate speech sounds, and distinguish basic tastes.

At birth, your baby's main brain circuits that control basic functions like breathing, heart rate, body temperature, digestion, sucking and reflexes are well developed. However, there are trillions of complex connections between brain cells to be formed and these are greatly influenced by what he or she experiences during childhood.

Cries, gurgles and body language are the way for your baby to communicate, so be attentive and work out what they are attempting to tell you. Every time you interact with your child, you are helping him/her to develop new connections within the brain.

As your baby's brain grows, the skills your baby demonstrates reflect the orderly and sequential development of the connections being made in the brain. These skills build on each other and allow the development of increasingly complex skills such as reading and writing.

Brain facts

- By the 17th week of pregnancy, your unborn child already has 1 billion brain cells more than an adult.
- At 7 months, your unborn child has 100 billion brain cells of potential.
- The brain is the only body organ incomplete at birth.
- At birth, the most complex parts of the brain are least developed, and the most affected by the environment.
- By your baby's first birthday, the brain has doubled in size and by the time babies are three years old, their brain is approximately 90% of the weight of an adult's brain.



Getting to know your baby

Some fathers feel excluded from forming a relationship with their new child through the pregnancy and birth.

Bathing

Bathing your baby can really assist with bonding and help you learn your baby's language. Some fathers feel this takes longer because they are not feeding their baby. Changing nappies, despite the sight and smell, is a great way to develop a strong physical and emotional relationship with your child.



Feeling on the outside looking in?

Some fathers feel more uncomfortable if they are not involved in the process of breastfeeding. Dads report that where they are able to talk about their feelings with their partner, they are able to deal with this in a helpful way.

There are many important things a father can do to assist in building a relationship with their child such as bathing, changing nappies, cuddling them while they are awake, and playing simple games with them—even when they are a few days old.





Baby's communication

Facts about Crying

- Your body responds to the sound of crying by releasing hormones that cause you to feel stressed. This is your body's way of alerting you to your baby's needs.
- Babies have to adapt to a totally new world and even small changes can be stressful for them. Leaving babies to cry without comfort, even for a short period of time, can be distressing for them.
- Babies may cry for up to a total of 3 hours in a 24 hour period for no apparent reason. It is difficult not always being able to calm or soothe your baby.
- Babies' crying begins to increase at about 6 weeks of age and usually begins to lessen by about 3 to 4 months. This is due to normal development process.

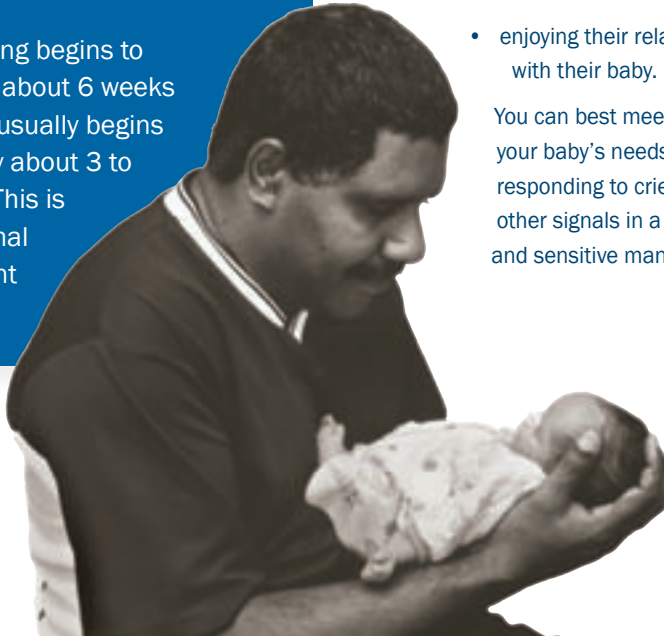
Cries, gurgles and body language communicate when your baby wants to interact with you and when the baby's brain needs a rest. To be in tune with your baby's needs, it helps to know the meaning of what these different communications look and sound like.

Interpreting the different communications correctly can be challenging. It is not uncommon for couples to have quite different experiences when hearing their baby cry. Many dads report that having the same understanding as their partner of their baby's communication promotes:

- appropriate responses to their baby's needs
- confidence and skills in each partner to handle their baby
- sharing the load, allowing each of you to have a break

- enjoying their relationship with their baby.

You can best meet your baby's needs by responding to cries and other signals in a prompt and sensitive manner.





Your relationship with your

Couples often talk about feeling closer in the days after the birth when they are excited about the baby they have created.

However, after a period of time, usually about a month, with interrupted sleep and the increase in household chores that are difficult to postpone, couples report an increase in stress.

Each partner feels he/she is the one making all the concessions due to the changes that he/she has experienced and this can lead to an increase in arguments and tension.

Some new fathers deal with this by getting home from work later and later in order to avoid the arguments. This will not resolve the issues, and in fact it could make them worse. A more positive step is to talk with your partner about how you can both manage these changes.

Will I ever have sex again?

Though many men talk about the changes in sexuality, in reality they talk about their desire to re-establish closeness, both physical and emotional. For some, this arises as a result of the birth experience, breast feeding and issues such as:

- Physical changes.
- A change in the way you view your sexuality as a couple. (This might be different for each of you.)
- Some women talk about being “all touched out”.



- Many couples talk about confusion between the use of breasts for nutrition and their use in sexual intimacy.
- Postnatal depression (PND) research has shown that there is a significant decrease in sexual interest when a person is depressed and/or using medication.

Many couples report these are difficult issues to discuss. It can be useful to use a counsellor to provide a neutral and safe place for these discussions.



partner



Extended families

Extended family on both sides can be very supportive, however sometimes they can be intrusive. This is often a delicate issue at the time of a new baby because each partner may like to have the support of his or her own family. It is useful to discuss and negotiate this issue as a couple.

Extended family is a very important support to a new family, however this needs to be managed in a way that is sensitive to the needs of everyone.

Work roles

It is very important for couples to discuss their roles within the home and outside the home.

For example, if a father wants to be closely involved with his children, it is not healthy for him to work a 50 hour week. Just as it is not healthy for a mother to be at home full time if her work is important to her and she gets unhappy at home.

Research has shown that it does not matter who takes on what roles as long as each person is happy with the role they have. It is useful for couples to discuss changes in roles, what is best for their family, and come to some agreement.



Birth related depression and

Emotional distress during pregnancy and following childbirth is common, but usually short-lived. Feeling low and tearful affects about 80% of all mothers around 3 to 4 days after giving birth. This is commonly referred to as the baby blues. The baby blues are a reaction to the hormonal changes that happen before, during and after the birth of the baby and should not be confused with postnatal depression (PND). These feelings will pass as the mother rebuilds her strength and her hormones settle down. Where either mother or father is experiencing depression or anxiety, the baby and other children in the family will be impacted, so it's important to get professional help sooner rather than later.



Who will experience PND and anxiety?

Most people know that depression related to pregnancy and birth can affect mothers, but it's important to remember that fathers are at risk as well. Depression can start in pregnancy and in Australia up to 9% of pregnant women experience antenatal depression. About 16% of all new mothers (that's about one in seven), and 5% of fathers develop PND in the year after having a baby.

Statistics show that depression and anxiety may be more common for those dads and mums who:

- have been depressed before
- have less practical, emotional or social support
- feel the burden of financial stress
- experience a difficult birth
- experience severe baby blues
- have a sick baby
- have major life and relationship difficulties, past and present
- find the reality of parenting is different from their expectations.



anxiety

What to look for

When PND affects your family, your experience will be unique, but you are well placed to be able to notice changes in each other's feelings, thoughts and behaviours.

Feelings – low mood, sadness, may seem anxious, worried or irritable.

Thoughts – e.g. 'I can't think clearly, I want to escape, My partner is rejecting me, something bad will happen'.

Behaviour – loss of interest in usual favourite activities, less energy or motivation, withdrawal from friends, 'letting yourself go', difficulty with routine tasks, arguing more, increased drinking.

You may find it difficult to know if changes in your eating and sleeping patterns are normal when caring for a newborn, or if the changes are signs of depression. Discuss any signs or symptoms with your partner to work out if changes you are experiencing may indicate PND or anxiety.

If your partner has PND

The demands of caring for a partner and baby when depression is present in the family can put a strain on even the strongest relationship. It is normal to feel confused, angry or responsible for what your partner is going through. Your partner's well-being can directly affect your own, so it is important to talk about your concerns with your partner, a friend, relative or seek professional help.

What about your baby?

Depression can make it difficult to interact with your baby in a joyful, responsive way. Anxiety may undermine confidence in caring for your baby. Depression can also make normal babies' cues like crying confusing and overwhelming. Take care to recognise and encourage each other's relationship and bonding with your baby. Promote physical contact, talking, touching, feeding, bathing and nappy changing. In particular take time to have regular 'play-times' with your baby.

What can I do?

- Talk with your partner – try to maintain good, open communication. Listen to each other's feelings and thoughts, and ask, "What can I do to help?"
- It is important to help with practical household tasks and caring for your baby.
- Plan some quality time together as a couple and practise intimacy and affection because your relationship is important.
- Ask for help from family members and friends even for the small things.
- Complete checklist on the card inserted in this booklet and follow recommendations.
- Check out www.beyondblue.org.au or call the info line 1300 22 4636.

Feeding

Babies stomachs are about the size of a fist so they need food little and often. Newborns need to feed at least 6–12 times, or up to a total of 8 hours in a 24 hour cycle. Feeding your baby over this 24 hour cycle can leave you and your partner feeling tired, so it is important to talk together about managing this.

Research into breastfeeding shows that:

- Colostrum, the yellowish, sticky breast milk produced at the end of pregnancy, is food for the newborn, and is available within the first hour after birth.
- The antibodies in breastmilk protect against upper respiratory and ear infection, which is very common in babies.
- Breastmilk reduces the risk in babies of developing allergies.
- Women who breastfeed have a lower rate of breast cancer.
- Mothers are more likely to stop breastfeeding if the father is not supportive.

Breastfeeding

If you want to give your child a great start in life and your partner can breastfeed, your encouragement can make a big difference.

If you feel breastfeeding is affecting your relationship with your partner talk to each other about it.

Breastmilk changes as your baby grows and its properties provide what is needed for your baby's brain growth, development and immunity. Health benefits for mother and baby will continue for as long as breast feeding is taking place.

Breastfeeding can require persistence by mother and baby and may take up to 8–12 weeks to become properly established. If your family is having difficulty with breastfeeding, speak to:

- the maternity hospital you attended
- the local Child Health Nurse
- Australian Breastfeeding Association.



Formula Feeding

The decision to formula feed is best made as a family and it is the role of health professionals to give you clear and accurate information to help you decide what is best for your family.

Many mums have breastfeeding as an ideal picture of parenting and can see moving to formula as them having failed. If this happens, you can best support your partner by allowing her to express this grief or disappointment and talk through this together. You may also have some similar regrets that need expressing.

Bonding with baby will occur when feeding, so make the most of these moments and aim for handling that allows for eye contact with your baby. You may also need to find a quiet place if your baby is easily distracted.

To aid the bonding, it is important that just you and your partner feed your baby.

Feeding facts:

- There are many different formulas on the market and paying more is no guarantee of better results for your child. Do some research together.
- Teats have different flow rates. You may have to experiment depending on how fast your baby likes the formula to come through.
- If you think your baby is prone to allergies or is reacting to the formula, talk to your GP or other child health professional before changing formulas.



Playing with babies

Babies learn through play and take information in through the use of touch, taste, sight, hearing and smell. In the early months and beyond, these senses provide the information that your baby will use to feel reassured and comforted and be stimulated to grow.

As a dad, playing with your baby is vital, and helps your baby develop physically, intellectually and emotionally.



Play helps babies grow

- “Tummy time” - placing babies flat on their stomach to play, is beneficial for muscular and brain development. They may need extra entertainment during this time.
- Variations in types of play and toys, helps build skills in different areas.
- Rattles build physical and hand-eye coordination.
- Using words, rhymes and stories builds the brain’s storage of language and memory.
- Peek-a-boo with dad can build communication and expression of emotions.
- You are your child’s most important toy.



Sleep

Sleep is a science and the more you understand about your new baby, the more likely you are going to encourage the right environment for him/her to sleep well.



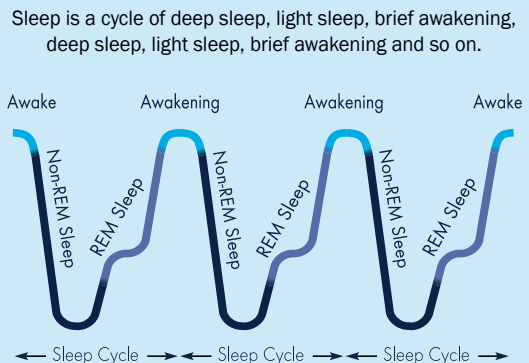
Babies' Sleep Cycle

- Newborns in their first few weeks will show signs they are ready for sleep after 1–1.5 hours of wakefulness.
- Young babies sleep cycles commence with REM sleep.
- Babies 3–6 months need to sleep after 1.5 to 2.5 hours.
- Sleep improves at night when babies experience natural light during the day.
- REM (rapid eye movement) sleep is a time of dreaming, movement and practising what has been learnt during the day. Non-REM sleep is the deep sleep with no movement.
- Babies have clusters of REM sleep in the early morning and may give an impression they are awake.

Did you know?

- Many babies need to learn how to settle and resettle themselves to sleep. This is simply falling asleep on their own without any assistance from an adult, and starts to happen at 4–6 months.
- Most newborns up to 3 months sleep between approximately 15 and 18 hours in a 24 hour period.
- Babies need sleep for physical growth and to allow their immune systems to develop effectively. They also need sleep to recharge and develop their brains.
- Babies communicate (through body movements and vocal sounds) whether they want to play, settle, sleep or be changed.

Contact Ngala for details on books and resources.



Refer to "Secrets of Good Sleepers" Ngala (2010)

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Parenting with Confidence



beyondblue

the national depression initiative
www.beyondblue.org.au

This booklet was produced in a partnership between Ngala, a provider of early parenting services in Western Australia, and *beyondblue: the national depression initiative*.

For early parenting services in your state, see the *Helpful Contacts for Dads* card inserted in this booklet, or contact:

Pregnancy, birth & baby helpline
1800 882 436

Ngala: www.ngala.com.au

For more on depression and anxiety see the card inserted with this booklet, or contact:

beyondblue info line **1300 22 4636**
or www.beyondblue.org.au

PANDA Helpline **1300 726 306**

Post and Antenatal Depression Association



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beyondblue is proud to acknowledge the support of Movember in raising awareness of depression and anxiety in men.