



# The Dads' Booklet

Fatherhood - First 12 Months

Pregnancy & birth

Getting to know your baby

Baby's communication

Relationships

Depression & anxiety

Feeding

Sleep

**DadsWA**  
**Ngala**

Parenting with Confidence

# 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 time in their life, to shock 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 sleep when possible.

## Think about your supports

Who can you ask for advice and practical support when your baby is born? This can include shopping, meal preparation, and cleaning. Why not check it out now and discuss it with your family so that you have some plans in place when you return from hospital.

If you intend to be with your partner for the birth of your baby, it is worth being prepared, as it can be a pretty full-on experience. Most men attend antenatal classes where they can ask about what to expect during the birth.

## Dad's hospital kit – What to Bring

- Camera & mobile ready to go, with chargers & credit.
- A supply of energy food & drinks.
- Something to read, games & music to help pass the time if things are going slowly.
- Clean clothes, tooth brush, toiletries, medication & glasses.
- Loose change for vending machines & parking.

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

## Organising time off work

- Discuss with partner, and others what support you and your partner will need.
- Negotiate with employer.
- Decide how much time you will take off work during and after the birth.
- You may be eligible for government funded "Dad and Partner Pay"



# Welcome to fatherhood

## Fathers handling their baby

Some dads think that their partners are better at baby-handling skills such as changing nappies, bathing and settling them to sleep. You both start parenthood with lots to learn about your baby – mums do not have special skills any more than dads – confidence comes with practice and time.

Each of you will handle your baby differently.

- Differences in handling have a positive influence on child brain development.
- Differences can result in improved coordination and physical development.
- 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.

*When the birth is over, many dads focus on what lies ahead as a parent, think about their new found responsibilities, and feel a sense of relief that their partner and baby are doing well.*

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. You can also contact your local parenting support organisation.



# Help your baby to learn

**F**rom 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, hear your voice, have a good sense of smell, and can distinguish basic tastes.

## Brain facts

- By the 17th week of pregnancy, your unborn child 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 most affected by the environment.
- By your baby's first birthday, their brain has doubled in size and by the time babies are three years old, their brain is approximately 90% the weight of an adult's brain.

Babies brains at birth have the main basic functions like breathing, sucking, and maintaining body temperature. These core functions benefit from lots of physical contact and closeness with parents. There are trillions of complex connections to be formed between brain cells and these are greatly influenced by what he or she experiences during the early years.

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



Your baby is rapidly developing new skills and abilities which reflects 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.



# Getting to know your baby

Fathers develop and maintain a close relationship with their baby through everyday interactions.

Unborn babies can hear from 25 weeks, so you can talk and sing to your baby before their birth. Holding your baby early and often is wonderful for your relationship. Babies are generally alert and very awake after the birth. When holding your baby you might try opening your mouth or poking your tongue out. Your baby will often mimic back.

*Let your baby smell you and get to know you more as they already know your voice and touch.*

## What can you do?

Some fathers may feel that building a relationship with their child takes longer because they are not feeding their baby. However, 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.

Bathing your baby can be soothing for both of you with lots of skin-to-skin contact to help with bonding. Changing nappies

whilst talking and singing to your baby is a great way to develop a strong physical and emotional relationship with your baby.

## Feeling Left Out?

Some fathers may feel uncomfortable if they are not involved in the process of breastfeeding or other caregiving activities. Fathers report that when they talk about their feelings with their partner, they are able to deal with this in a helpful way.



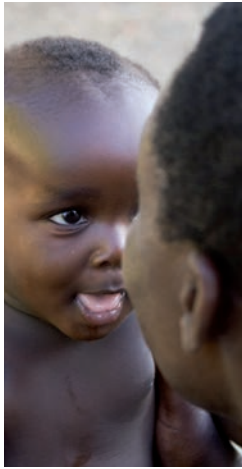
# Baby's communication

**C**ries, gurgles and body language helps you understand when your baby wants to interact with you and when your baby 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 cries and noises, facial expressions and body movements correctly can be challenging. It is common 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.



## What's all the crying about?

- 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 a 'distressed' baby to cry without comfort, even for a short period of time, is detrimental to their development.
- It is ok for babies to cry at times for a short period. They may cry for up to a total of 3 hours in a 24 hour period during their first 3 months.
- Crying is a normal part of your baby's development. If you are unable to work out why your new baby is crying, just wrap and hold 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.
- In learning how to settle and comfort your baby as they grow, you build your own confidence in being able to read their cues/language.

# Your relationship with your

*Each partner can feel they are the one making all the changes... this can lead to arguments and tension.*

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, couples sometimes report an increase in stress.

Some new fathers deal with relationship difficulties 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 as a team.

## Will I ever have sex again?

Though many men talk about the changes in sexuality, in reality they are concerned about their desire to re-establish closeness, both physical and emotional. For some, this arises as a result of the birth experience, breastfeeding 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” as they have held and fed baby all day.
- 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

## Work roles

It is 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, he may consider what possible changes he can make if he is working 50 hours each week. Just like a mother at home full-time caring for their child may find that some outside work is important for her health and happiness.

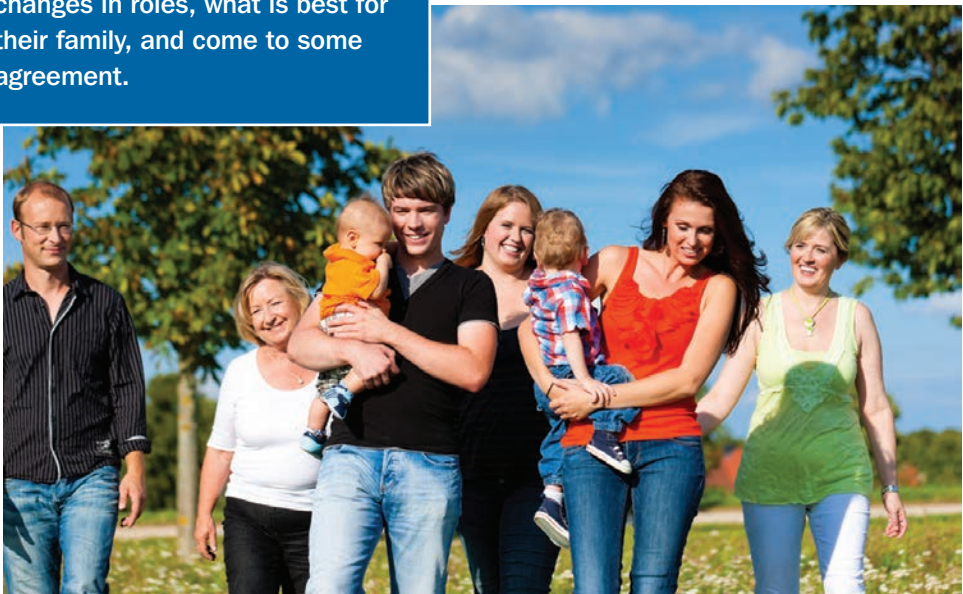
Research has shown that it does not matter who takes on what roles as long as each person is happy with the role they have. It is useful for couples to discuss changes in roles, what is best for their family, and come to some agreement.

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## 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 can be 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.



# Birth related depression and

If 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.

**E**motional 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, and should not be confused with postnatal depression (PND). These feelings will pass as the mother rebuilds her strength and her hormones settle down.

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. About 16% of all new mothers (that's about one in six), and 5% of fathers develop PND in the year after having a baby. Anxiety conditions are likely to be at least as common.

## What to look for

**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 or anxiety.

# anxiety

## If your partner has PND

The demands of caring for a partner and baby when depression or anxiety 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 and/ 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 and anxiety can also make normal babies' cues like crying confusing and overwhelming. Take time to have regular 'play-times' with your baby. Encourage each other to frequently interact with your baby with physical contact, talking, touching, feeding, bathing, and nappy changing.

## What can I do?

- Listen to each other's feelings and thoughts, and ask, "What can I do to help?"
- Help with practical household tasks and caring for your baby.
- Plan some quality time together as a couple and nurture your relationship with affection.
- Ask for help from family members and friends even for the small things.



## For Helpful Info About Depression & Anxiety

beyondblue info line 1300 22 4636 [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

PANDA Helpline (Post and Antenatal Depression Assoc.)  
1300 726 306 [www.panda.org.au](http://www.panda.org.au)

From the Heart WA - local support groups  
(08) 9340 1622 [www.fromtheheartwa.org.au](http://www.fromtheheartwa.org.au)

# Feeding

A baby's stomach is small and they need to be fed frequently in the first few weeks. This may be between 5-12 times in a 24 hour period. Growth spurts can be confusing because the baby seems hungry all the time. Your partner will naturally produce more breastmilk in response to frequently feeding.

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.

## 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 breastfeeding is taking place.

Breastfeeding may require persistence by mother and baby and take several weeks for them to become confident. If your family is having difficulty with breastfeeding, seek some professional help.

## Benefits of breastmilk

- 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 breastfeed if the father is supportive.
- Expressing breastmilk and storing it for later use can be helpful if mum needs to be away from your baby for a short time.



## 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 talk about her feelings.

*It is best that just you and your partner feed your baby so they can start to learn about you and you learn about your baby.*

*This also gives baby some consistency and security in the way feeding time is experienced.*

## Introducing Solids

Some signs your baby might be ready for solids at 5-7 months include: grabbing for food as you eat, making chewing motions with her face, and drooling or excited when she sees others eating.

### 5-7 months

Start with mashed or pureed.



### Move towards...

Gradually include coarse mash: grated, minced and finely chopped. Encourage soft finger foods that baby can hold and chew such as rusks, soft vegetables and fruit.



### 9-12 months

Gradually include soft chopped foods. Encourage finger foods.

### 12 months +

Family meals – variety of textures. Finger foods.

Avoid foods that may cause choking eg. nuts and lollies.



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





# The importance of play

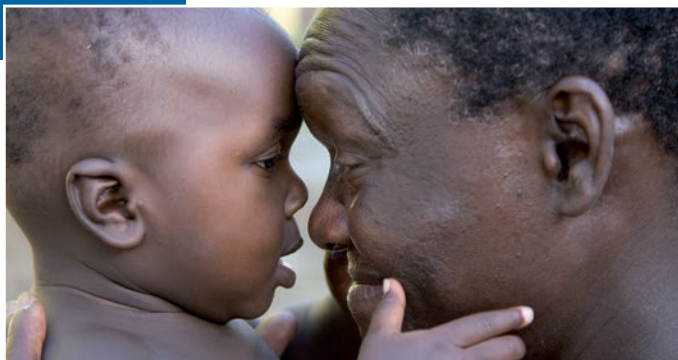
## Play helps babies grow

- Tummy time – placing babies flat on their stomach to play will help strengthen their neck muscles. Tummy time is beneficial for muscular and brain development.
- Variation 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.

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.*



## Did you know?

- Many babies need to learn how to settle themselves to sleep, and to resettle if they awaken before having had enough sleep. This is simply falling asleep on their own without any assistance from an adult, and starts to develop at 4–6 months.
- Babies need sleep for physical growth and to allow their immune systems to develop effectively. They also need sleep to recharge and develop their brain.
- Babies communicate whether they want to play, settle, sleep, or be changed, through body movements and vocal sounds.
- The amount of sensory stimulation your baby receives during the day affects their sleep. Babies need small amounts of stimulation mixed with rest and recovery to calm themselves.

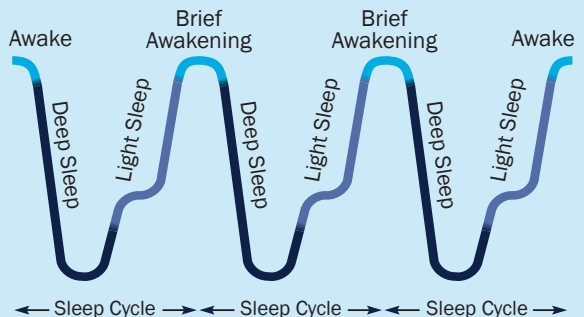
# Sleep

**S**leep – we all need it. Sleep is a learned skill 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 that they are ready for sleep after 1–1.5 hours of wakefulness.
- Babies 3–6 months need to sleep after being awake for 1.5 to 2.5 hours.
- Sleep improves at night when babies experience natural light during the day.
- Light sleep is a time of dreaming, movement and practising what has been learnt during the day. Deep sleep is a time with no movement, and rests body and brain.
- Sleep consist of a cycle of deep sleep, light sleep, brief awakening, deep sleep, light sleep, brief awakening, and so on.



Refer to "Secrets of Good Sleepers" Ngala (2010) and  
"Conversations About Sleep Video – 0-3 years" Ngala (2014)

# Info for Dads

## Parenting Support and Information

### Ngala

#### Helpline

(08) 9368 9368 or 1800 111 546

#### DadsWA, parenting workshops and resources

[www.ngala.com.au](http://www.ngala.com.au)



NgalaParenting

Parenting WA 1800 654 432

[www.communities.wa.gov.au](http://www.communities.wa.gov.au)

[www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)

## Support for Dads

SeparatedDadsWA (08) 9261 4444

MensLine 1300 78 99 78

## Dads' Parenting Activities

Contact your local government for Neighbourhood Centres

Playgroup WA for local playgroups, including playgroups with dads  
1800 171 882

[www.playgroupwa.com.au](http://www.playgroupwa.com.au)

[www.meerilinga.org.au](http://www.meerilinga.org.au)

## Courses for Dads

[www.ngala.com.au](http://www.ngala.com.au)

[www.mensplace.net.au](http://www.mensplace.net.au)

[www.anglicarewa.org.au](http://www.anglicarewa.org.au) (MensTime)

## Directory of services for men in WA

The Blokes' Book & The Moorditj Marmun Book available at  
[www.man.org.au](http://www.man.org.au)

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