

Becoming a Parent

The first few days with a new baby are usually a kind of honeymoon. Then it hits us we are responsible for keeping this precious little baby alive! You may feel unprepared and uninformed but remind yourself that all first-time parents feel this way.



Prepare for Change

Use the time before the baby arrives to gather information about the changes you will experience. Ask other parents how their relationship changed, how they felt about working, what their biggest challenges were and how they solved problems. Ask them too, about how much happiness the baby has brought them.

Parenthood is a Big Change

One moment you are an individual. The next moment there is a delightful but demanding baby in your arms. Caring for an infant is a big responsibility and if you're nervous, you're normal. Once the baby comes, parents can sometimes feel that they have lost control of their lives. Now, everything is controlled by the needs of your new baby.

Sometimes, despite a parent's best efforts, the baby just cries and cries. Many parents have asked themselves, "What's wrong with me? I can't even keep a little baby happy!" The best way to deal with your feelings about loss of control is to relax and try to 'go with the flow'. It won't always be like this. Babies' sleep and wake times gradually get more regular.

During those first few months, you should focus on looking after yourselves and your baby.

Looking after yourself means doing things that make you feel good. Make sure you take some time each day just for yourself. The better you feel, the better you'll parent.

Most parents now know that breast milk is the very best food for their baby. Breastfeeding is a skill that mothers and their babies learn together. It takes patience and quite often, a little help from others. If you have any concerns, call your public health nurse, registered midwife or doctor for help. Keep trying because the benefits of breastfeeding to both baby and mother are enormous.

Feelings

Feeling tearful, irritable, anxious and restless in the first week after the birth is called 'the blues' and occurs in about 70-80 per cent of new moms. It usually subsides within a week or two after birth and does not need medical treatment.

If 'the blues' don't go away within one to two weeks after the birth of your baby, you may be experiencing post partum depression. About 12-15 per cent of mothers experience post partum depression. Post partum depression can be described as tearfulness, feelings of depression, inadequacy and inability to cope. It is often accompanied by anxiety and overwhelming feelings of guilt, shame, isolation, fatigue, a sense of loss and sometimes, frightening fantasies. Get help right away if this sounds like what you're going through.

Post partum depression may occur immediately after a birth or many months later. It needs to be taken very seriously. If you suspect that you or someone you know is suffering from post partum depression, call your public health nurse, registered midwife or doctor.

The Pacific Post Partum Support Society in Vancouver is an excellent resource. The Pacific Post Partum Support Society can be reached by telephone at (604) 255-7999, or on the Internet at www.postpartum.org.

Parenthood Changes Lifestyles

Some people worry about how the baby will change their life, but in fact, babies and children introduce us to a whole new world that we wouldn't even know about without them.

You may find that you need to reconsider where you live. Access to parks, schools and community centres become important as do issues like the environment and safe places to play. Being close to friends and family who may help look after your child may also be important.

Your social life changes after a baby is born. You may find yourself forming stronger friendships with other parents whose interests and concerns are similar to yours.

Adult-oriented commitments like team sports may be difficult to keep up during this period, but staying active and healthy is important. As your child grows older, introduce them to your interests. If you like to hike in the outdoors, get a baby backpack and take walks in the woods. Sharing exercise is good for both of you.

Parenthood Changes a Couple's Relationship

While children are a very positive addition to our lives, they can put stress on the couple's relationship. In the first few months, you maybe tired and that makes it harder to be patient with each other. Meeting the needs of a baby means there is less time and energy to be together and to look after each other.

In the first months after the baby arrives you will be more tired and so your sexual relationship may temporarily become less active. It is important to keep looking after and loving each other.

Some suggestions include:

- Get together with other parents and talk about their experiences;
- Talk to your partner about the changes that are coming and explore different ways to handle them;
- Simplify your life during that first year of parenthood. Don't expect to keep up all the commitments you did before the baby came;
- Look for a parent and tot group in your community and get involved;
- Ask a trusted friend or family member to watch the baby for an hour or two while you and your partner go for a walk, have dinner or have a cuddle alone.

This BC HealthFile has presented some ideas to help you with the challenge of parenting. There are other topics in the child development series that you may also find helpful. The BC HealthFiles link and this series can be found on the BC HealthGuide Web site at:
www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm



For more BC HealthFile topics visit
www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm,
or visit your local public health unit.

Call the BC NurseLine to speak to a registered nurse, available 24-hours every day:

- In Greater Vancouver, call 604-215-4700
- In BC, call toll-free 1-866-215-4700
- Deaf and hearing-impaired, call 1-866-889-4700
- Pharmacist available 5pm to 9am every day
- Translation services in over 130 languages upon request.

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