



expectant mother's guide

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Life with Baby

Bringing up a baby can be exhilarating, overwhelming, exhausting, and inspiring, sometimes all at the same time. But few first-time parents are prepared for how dramatically a new little person can impact so many parts of their lives.

Many new moms discover that even if they have a strong support network of friends and family, they still feel cut off from the outside world. Pals without kids haven't been there, and friends with older children might not be as in tune to your feelings as you'd expect; the challenging early months of babyhood aren't as vivid to them anymore. On top of all that, your relationship with your partner will also be under a lot of stress.

The first essential step is to recognize and accept that your lifestyle must change. One excellent way to combat feelings of isolation is to seek out other women who have babies in the same age range as you. Together you'll help each other maneuver through new mommy-territory, and you might even develop friendships to last a lifetime. Sounds like a good idea, you might say. But how to do it? With a brand new baby to take care of, even the most basic task, like taking a daily shower, may seem monumental.

In the beginning, just getting out of the house with your baby will seem like an ordeal. But with practice, your comfort level will increase and you'll soon be racing out the door with all the necessary baby accessories. Don't worry, your days of spontaneously meeting a friend for coffee are not lost forever. Nor should they be. Socializing is vital to your well-being and to your baby's.

Many people think that only older children benefit from socializing with other kids. That's not true. Babies need to socialize as well; it offers stimulation and promotes their development, and new moms also reap the benefits. When your friends' network includes other new mothers, you get to share your babies' development together; you can talk about everything from sleep to sex, meals to mothers-in-law. Sometimes it helps just to have a safe place to vent.

Seek out other women in your same situation through "mommy and me" programs, new moms groups, or other community programs designed for babies and new mothers. Women that you meet during your pre-natal exercise or Lamaze classes, friends of friends, and even women at the baby supply store are potential new pals. Nurture the relationships that develop, start your own playgroup, schedule playdates, and treat yourself to a girls' night out.

Be prepared and get organized. Remember that little bit of advice and you'll find that you can get yourself and the baby out of the house in a lot less time and with a lot less hassle. Keep a bag of baby travel goods packed and ready to go so that you don't have to rummage about when it's actually time to leave. Post a "Don't Forget to Bring..." list by the door. Have the car stashed with the baby essentials: a couple of diapers, wipes, a pacifier if the baby uses one, and powdered formula if you're not breastfeeding.

Another big change happens in the relationship with your partner. Before the baby, home life is all about each other and about being a couple. It's hard to imagine how becoming a threesome will actually feel, but you can try to prepare mentally. The baby has been completely dependent upon you for nine (okay, ten) months, hearing your voice daily and feeling your movements. Even before birth, you've likely already developed an attachment to the baby,

so your attachment is strong from the start. But Dad may need more time to bond with baby. He might not understand your special relationship with the baby, and he might even feel threatened by it. He may even feel like a third wheel.

It's important to keep the lines of communication open with your partner. If necessary, schedule time to talk into your day. Ask a grandparent to baby-sit and have a "date" night. If that's not feasible, plan a "night out", but stay in. Most restaurants will prepare food to go. Focus on each other and talk about how you're both feeling.

Also try organizing get-togethers with new moms you've meet and their husbands. This kind of socializing with other couples gives the dads a safe place to do their "guy thing". Even if they aren't interested in opening up and talking about how they're feeling (relationship-wise), the camaraderie can be beneficial and fun.

Above all, be kind to yourself. A young baby's needs are very basic: food, sleep, and love are what they need more than anything else. Beyond that, the best thing you can do for your baby is to take care of yourself. When you're happy, relaxed, and rested (well, as rested as possible), your baby is likely to pick up on your mood and respond in kind.

Editorial provided by Loretta Jay, M.A. Loretta is a community planner and the founder and president of Parasol, LLC, based in Fairfield. Parasol offers programs for parents and children as well as consulting services.

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