

First Week at Home

For most mothers, the first few weeks at home with a new baby are the hardest of their lives. You will probably feel overworked, even overwhelmed. Inadequate sleep will leave you feeling fatigued. Caring for a baby can be a lonely and stressful responsibility. You may wonder if you will ever catch up with the rest of your work. The solution is to ask for help. No one is expected to care for a young baby alone.

Preventing Exhaustion

Go to bed earlier in the evening. When your baby naps, you should nap too. He/she does not need you hovering over while he/she sleeps. If he/she is sick, he/she will show symptoms. Take the telephone off the hook while sleeping. If you cannot take care of yourself, it will be difficult for you to take care of the baby.

Preventing Blues

More than 50% of women experience postpartum "blues" on the third or fourth day of delivery. The symptoms include tearfulness, tiredness, sadness, and difficulty thinking clearly. The main cause of this temporary reaction is probably the sudden decrease of maternal hormones after delivery. Since the symptoms commonly begin on the day, mother comes home from the hospital, the full impact of being totally responsible for a dependent newborn, may also be a contributing factor. Many mothers feel guilty about the symptoms because they have been led to believe that they should be overjoyed about caring for a baby. The symptoms usually clear up in one to three weeks as hormone levels return to normal and mother develops a sense of control over her life.

There are several ways to cope with the postpartum blues:

- Acknowledge your feelings. Discuss them with your significant other or a close friend. Do not try to suppress crying or put on a "supermom" show for everyone.
- Get adequate rest.
- Get help with your work.
- Interact with other people. Do not let yourself become isolated. Get out of the house at least every week-go to the hairdresser, go shopping, and go to the gym, visit a friend, or watch a movie.
- If you do not feel better by the time your baby is 1 month old, talk to your physician (Ob-Gyn) about the possibility of getting counseling or medication for depression.

Father's Role

If it is possible, the baby's father should take time off from work to be with you during labor and delivery, as well as on the day you and the child come home from the hospital. If you have a relative who can temporarily live in and help, the father can continue to work after the baby comes home. Then when the relative leaves, the father may choose to take paternity leave or leave without pay under the Family Leave Act. Fathers can help with feeding, changing diapers, bathing, dressing, putting the baby to bed, playing with the baby and calling the physician when the child is sick. Some fathers avoid interacting with the babies during the first year of life because they are afraid that they will hurt the baby or will not be able to comfort the baby when the baby cries. The longer the father goes without learning parenting skills, the harder it becomes to master them. A father should hold and comfort a baby at least once a day.

Helpers

Remember that everyone needs extra help during the first few weeks with a new baby. The best person to help (*if you get along with her*) is usually your mother or mother-in-law. If not, ask other relatives or friends to help out. If you have other young children, you will absolutely need daily help.

