New parent stress: know what to expect

Instead of having one of those cute, clean babies you see in commercials, you have a crying, endlessly dirty one. Your life has changed more than you'd ever imagined. You are hopelessly in love with your child, but will you ever have the energy to enjoy parenthood?



It is normal to feel a little overwhelmed during the first few weeks. You will probably also feel very tired. Both will ease with time. However, if you are experiencing a troubling change in your couple relationship, severe depression or continued anger towards your spouse or baby, it is time to seek professional help. Meanwhile, here are some tips to help you through the first few weeks:

How is mom feeling?

New mothers can be plagued by strong emotions and doubts.

- You love your baby but may have been unprepared for the accompanying personal and work-related changes.
- A fussy or colicky baby can add to the burden.
- Changes in post-pregnancy appearance can be distressing.
- Many mothers feel overwhelmed by their new responsibilities.

How is dad feeling?

- Today's fathers take a more active role in pregnancy, childbirth and in child care than their fathers did. The richness of this experience can leave fathers exhausted, overwhelmed and numb.
- Although they enjoy watching their wives care for the child, they sometimes feel jealous of their closeness and wonder if their wives will still care for them as much.
- Many fathers feel guilty about feelings of jealousy.
- Worries about money and planning for the baby's future plague many new fathers.

Sexual changes

- As a new parent, your life is controlled by the 'f' word—fatigue. Life is lived in snatches between feedings and diaper changes. Little else seems to get done beyond meeting the needs of baby.
- Talking and feelings of intimacy are often at an all time low.
- Although some couples find a new "normal" sex life soon after the baby is born, many other couples find it impossible to find the energy and the time.
- Try to be patient. Some parents report six to 12 months before their sex life is again "normal."
- It takes planning, maybe a relative or friend to babysit, and occasional afternoon trysts to restore some of the old zest.

Parent's survival checklist

- Rest during baby's naps
- Aim to accomplish at most one thing per day
- Give each other gifts of alone time
- Have dates as often as possible
- Keep a daily journal
- Remember the "non-parent" things you love about yourself
- Don't expect too much of yourself or your spouse

- If you are a single parent, develop a network of friends and family to help out

The early days of parenting can take a real toll on new moms and dads. Understand that this, too, shall pass. Your child won’t always be this needy, and you won’t always be this sleep-deprived. Try and rest when you can, don’t expect too much of yourself or your partner, and enjoy this time getting to know your new little one. If things really are too much to take, reach out to friends, family, or a professional counsellor for support.