

First-time dad tips—how to be a hands-on dad

Wondering how dads can help with newborns? New dads shouldn't need to feel like a spare part, there are plenty of ways you can bond with your baby and support your partner so you're a strong family unit, right from the start. Follow these new dad tips for advice on everything from how dads can help during labour to father-baby bonding, and get ready to shine in your new role as a hands-on dad!

Prepare yourself for the birth

Read up on what to expect and show your partner you're taking a keen interest. Take pregnancy classes together—as well as all the practical advice, you'll get a new-found appreciation of what your partner's body is about to go through, discover how dads can help during labour and you may find it helps with father-bonding with your baby during pregnancy. Taking classes with other parents-to-be is a great way to find your new support network too.

Wondering how dads can help with newborns?

Hopefully you learned in your pregnancy classes how to change a diaper, bathe a newborn and soothe a crying baby? So play an active role right from the beginning and put your baby-care skills into action. Offer to take the night shift to give your partner a break—if your partner is breastfeeding, you could be the one who burps, changes and settles baby afterwards. And if you're bottle-feeding, then this is a great opportunity for you to enjoy some evening feeds together and encourage father-baby bonding from the start.

Learn your baby's cues

Look out for early signs of baby hunger cues and baby tired cues so you can jump in before the dreaded crying starts. Signs for a hungry baby can include sucking on hands, rooting and smacking lips, while clenched fists, jerky limb movements, and a glazed stare can all be baby tired cues. Become a master at reading baby cues and you'll be forever in the good books.

- Get lots of skin-to-skin contact with dad and baby

Placing your naked baby (apart from diaper) on your bare chest (inside your shirt if it's cold) brings so many benefits—from regulating baby's heart rate and temperature, to relaxing them and helping you to bond. A great time for dad skin-to-skin contact is after you've given your baby a bath, first thing in the morning when you can scoop them into bed with you, or during bottle-feeds to provide lots of tactile stimulation. You'll no doubt enjoy the father-baby bonding as much as they do.

- Talking to your newborn

Every word your baby hears helps to develop their language skills and strengthen your relationship with them. So as well reading to your baby, give them a running commentary of what you're doing, no matter how mundane the task might be—"I'm just looking for a burping cloth to wipe up this spit-up". Lots of cuddles also go a long way.

- Offer breastfeeding support

There are many examples of dads supporting breastfeeding that you can follow. Whether it's making your partner comfortable with pillows and back rubs, bringing her a glass of water without her needing to ask (moms can get very thirsty as their milk starts to flow), or simply listening if she's struggling. Breastfeeding can be challenging, particularly in the early days, so find out about breastfeeding support services if your partner needs help.

- Take care of your relationship after baby has come along

Having a baby is a life-changing experience—and it may not turn out to be the romantic picture of parenthood you had in mind—so it's more important than ever to be open and honest with each other about how you're feeling and any strains it's putting on the relationship. Yes, there may be a new VIP in town, but show your partner how in awe of her you are. Pamper her (think post-pregnancy massage), give her a break, talk and listen—these can all help to alleviate new parents' relationship problems. And if you and mom are feeling like you need more time adjusting to life as the three of you, take control of the baby visitor situation and just say no (politely) to guests, so she doesn't have to. [Read our checklist on how to handle visitors after giving birth](#) ^[1]for more tips.

- Self-care for dads

Yes, self-care for dads is really a thing! It's vitally important that you take good care of yourself, so you can take better care of your family. So try to get some regular exercise—pushing the buggy up hills provides a pretty good workout—sleep when you can, and make sure you have family and friends you can share the highs and lows of parenting with. It helps to unload and they might even have their own first-time dad tips

to offer. Don't forget to make sure your partner gets some self-care time too!

Sharing household duties

It might sound obvious but pulling your weight around the home is more important now than ever. In the first few weeks after the birth, you'll need to take on the bulk of the household chores. Here's some invaluable advice for new dads, rather than even asking, "What's for dinner tonight?", take the required brain power out of the equation and surprise your partner with one of her favourite meals instead. She may feel too exhausted to even think after weeks of feeding and nurturing your newborn, so she'll need plenty of sustenance to keep her going. Then as you get into the rhythm of things, have a chat about how you're splitting parenting responsibilities and sharing household duties so you're clear on who's doing what.

Take lots of photos!

The first weeks and months of parenthood may fly by in a blur, with your baby changing every day. So make sure you're always on hand to document it—taking pictures of not just your beautiful new bundle of joy, but of your partner holding her too. More often than not, she'll have her hands full with baby (while you might have your phone in your hands), so next time you spot a picture opportunity—and they happen every day at feeding time, story time, bath time—capture it. And no, this doesn't have to be to styled and posed to post on social media, but just so you and your partner can look back in years to come and remember that time when you became parents.

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