

# Support & Sanity Savers for New Parents

## Basics

In preparing for a new baby, many expectant parents spend hours shopping for baby clothes, decorating the nursery, and deciding which car seat to buy. Yet most don't think much about what the reality of parenting a newborn will be like, and what they need to make it through that. So, here is the advice of experienced parents. We know you'll read this, and think "they're exaggerating, I don't *really* need that." Just trust us on these, OK? Plan for all of this, and if it turns out you don't need it, come back and teach us how you did it!

## Must-Haves (Once baby's survival needs are met, attend to your own survival needs!)

### Sleep

An average newborn sleeps 16 – 18 hours per day, over 6 – 7 sleep periods, rarely more than three hours at a time. It is normal and healthy for a newborn to wake several times at night... but really hard on parents.

**Naps.** Prioritize sleep above any responsibilities like: cleaning house, visiting friends, running errands, etc. Sleep whenever baby sleeps. If you can't nap, at least have restful times when you can, like while baby eats. The more rest you get, the more patient you will be, the more emotionally stable, and the better at solving problems.

**Optional: A sleep book.** There are lots of books and other sources for advice on how to get your baby to sleep more. Some are helpful, many just create more stress. We recommend: *The No Cry Sleep Solution* by Pantley. We do NOT recommend *Solve your Child's Sleep Problems* by Ferber or *Babywise* by Ezzo.

### Food

You may not have realized it would be difficult to eat when you have a newborn. Yet, when we talk to countless new parents, they say things like "it may be 2:00 pm when I realize I haven't had breakfast yet." Or "every time we sit down to dinner, baby needs to eat, and then my food gets cold, so I don't bother to eat it."

**Finger food.** Before baby is born, stock up with one month's worth of food that: 1) you can eat with one hand while holding a baby, 2) doesn't need to be prepped, 3) is good hot or cold, 4) doesn't spoil when left out for a few hours, and 5) you like to eat. Think about: nuts, dried fruit, cliff bars, pretzels, jerky, gogurt, baby carrots, sugar snap peas, apples, bananas, crackers, cheez-n-crackers, string cheese, hot pockets or frozen burritos to microwave, garden burgers and breakfast pastries to put in the toaster, yogurt drinks, etc.

### Emotional Support

**Know who to call when you're stressed out.** Parenting a newborn is very challenging work. There are times when it will totally overwhelm your normal coping abilities. EVERY NEW PARENT NEEDS TO HAVE A PLAN FOR WHO TO CALL WHEN THEY JUST CAN'T COPE ANY MORE. (And it has to be someone other than the baby's other parent!) Before baby is born, get a business sized card to tuck into your wallet: write on it the name and phone number of a friend or family member you can call for support. Also include a parenting crisis line: In Seattle, call the Parent Trust Line, (206)233-0139. Nationwide, hotlines for support are: National Parent Hotline 1-855- 4A PARENT or call 1-800-4ACHILD (ChildHelp).

**Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders.** If you have a personal or family history of depression or mental illness, or if you have a lot of stress in your life right now (e.g. recent move, recent job loss, death in the family, divorce, etc.) then you are at greater risk of postpartum depression, anxiety, or OCD. Make sure you're aware of the signs and symptoms, and before birth, talk to friends about the signs of postpartum depression so they know how to help you watch out for it. [www.womenshealth.gov/depression](http://www.womenshealth.gov/depression) or [www.postpartum.net/](http://www.postpartum.net/)

# Really, Really Helpful

## Physical Support with Taking Care of Yourself

**Asking friends and family.** Before baby is born, set up a schedule of people who can come and visit and help out (or ask a friend to schedule for you). Any time *anyone* says ‘let me know what I can do to help’, sign them up for a day. When they get there, their job is *not* to take care of the baby (that’s your job and your joy). Their job is to take care of you! It’s helpful to make a list in advance of what you think you may need help with.

**Postpartum doulas.** If you don’t have anyone you can call on for support, look into postpartum doulas: professionals at helping parents with caring for baby, caring for themselves, getting breastfeeding started, and helping with household tasks. Exact services and time needed depend on your needs. For referrals in Seattle area, call Northwest Association for Postpartum Support. (206)955-6155. Or [doulamatch.net](http://doulamatch.net). Nationwide: [dona.org](http://dona.org).

## Peer Support / Parent Groups

**Why:** One of the greatest things for new parents is to be around other new parents. Parent groups give you a chance to get new ideas and advice, get a sense of what is normal infant development by watching several babies learn and grow, share your stories of triumph and struggles with empathetic ears, and forgive your own mistakes when you realize *all* parents are learning by trial and error.

**Where to find.** There are many places you can meet other new parents: mommy and me exercise classes, parent and baby classes at your community college, La Leche League, family support centers, infant massage classes, etc. In Seattle, we heartily recommend PEPS, the Program for Early Parent Support. [www.pepsgroup.org](http://www.pepsgroup.org)

## Time for your Relationship

It’s easy to get so caught up in meeting baby’s immediate needs that it’s hard to find time to connect with your partner, and meet the needs of your relationship. It’s also easy to forget what “quality time with your partner” actually looks like. If you take your baby on a date, you’d be amazed how much of your couple time is spent feeding the baby, diapering the baby, admiring the baby, and talking about the baby.

**Dating.** Try to take time for just the two of you. Babysitter tip: Sometimes when moms are breastfeeding a newborn, they find it hard to figure out how to schedule outings around baby’s unpredictable feeding schedules. Have the babysitter come for a three hour period. When she comes over, if baby has just eaten, you can leave right away, and come back in two hours. If baby hasn’t fed recently, you start the date at home. Once baby gets hungry and gets a good feeding in, you can head out for the rest of your date time.

**Date Nights at Home.** If you can’t get out, at least set aside one evening a week to prioritize relationship: whenever baby dozes off or doesn’t have any immediate needs, spend a little time focusing on each other.

**Potential conflicts.** The main relationship conflicts that come up for new parents are: issues related to sexuality, financial stresses, a feeling of an unfair division of household tasks, and conflicts in parenting styles. The more you can work on these issues before baby arrives, the better! If you feel like your relationship is struggling now, now is the time to seek counseling and support. Don’t expect having a baby to “fix” a challenged relationship... they usually make it harder to work on your relationship.

## Fun and Frills (Don’t forget these... and don’t feel guilty for indulging in them!)

Everyone has something in life that is a fun little treat that they do just for themselves. It may be: reading the morning paper, or going for a daily jog, or having coffee with a friend once a week, or going to a movie on Friday nights, or fine chocolates, or bubble baths, or curling up with a good book, or....

Unless you do fun things for yourself every now and then, it’s hard to have the energy for fun with baby. Whatever your “selfish” treats are, make sure you find a way to continue to indulge in them after baby is born. These little things are what can recharge you, and allow you to return to baby with a new joy.

# Request for Help After Baby is Born

My childbirth instructors told me I need help and support after the baby comes. They tell me that “sometimes when parents are caring for all the needs of a newborn, they have a hard time taking care of their own needs. They need their friends and family to help out with this.” They say I’ll have a hard time finding time to make meals, take showers, do laundry and all those other things that are normally easy for me to take care of. I’m not sure I believe them.... But, I’m asking for your help, just in case.

After my baby comes, would you be willing to help out?

Here’s what we’ll need: Once a day, we need someone who can come check in on us and help us out with whatever we need. Here’s what would help:

- 1) Call to remind us that you’re coming, and see if we need you to pick up anything (like a hot meal, or diapers, or groceries.)
- 2) When you arrive, forgive us if our house is messy and we haven’t showered.
- 3) When you arrive, ask us again what we most need: we may need help washing dishes or starting the laundry, we may need help holding the baby while we shower, we may need someone to just sit and listen to us talk about what life is like, we may need to nap. We may not be able to figure out what we need... just check the refrigerator for our to-do list. Before the baby was born, we made up a list of what we might need help with, and we try to add to that now, as we think of things.
- 4) Some days we might enjoy having a visitor over for an hour or two (and we might have lots of things that we need help with). Other days we’d rather have quiet time to ourselves and might ask that you only stay for a few minutes. Please plan to be flexible.
- 5) We really look forward to letting you meet our new baby! We’re happy that you’ll be part of our baby’s life. However, in the early days after birth, if you come to help, we want to remind you that we’ll be learning our new job as parents, and that’s exactly what we’ll want to be doing at that point. We expect that we will want to be doing all of the baby care things, and won’t need you to care for baby. We need you to help take care of us! ☺

If you can help, please fill this out and give it back to us.... THANKS!

Names \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

What day(s) of the week are you most likely to be able to help out \_\_\_\_\_

How many times could we call on you in the first couple weeks? \_\_\_\_\_

Is there anything you especially would like to help with, or wouldn’t want to help with?

\_\_\_\_\_