

Just in Time Parenting

Future moms can cope with emotions by resting and writing in a journal.



The time is almost here. Your baby will arrive before you know it. Future moms experience lots of emotions because giving birth and parenting is such a big deal. Just before giving birth, many mothers-to-be feel like they cannot wait for the pregnancy to be over. They may worry about the baby's health. They may also feel confused about all the different advice everyone is giving them. On top of all this, they might feel absentminded, oversensitive, and unattractive.

It's not all bad, though. Future moms feel special because of all the attention from friends, family, and even strangers. Couples may also feel closer by sharing this experience. Here are some ways moms-to-be can feel their best:

- **Keep moving and stay active** by walking, swimming, or stationary cycling.

- **Pamper yourself.** Do something special for yourself like getting a new haircut or finding a good book to read.
- **Develop a support system** to help you prepare for the baby — so the entire burden is not on you.
- **Get enough rest.** Try to go to bed at a decent hour. Try using pillows to help you find a comfortable sleep position. Doing too many activities without enough sleep may make you feel tired and cranky. If you can, take a nap during the day.

- **Learn ways to relax.** If you feel stress, try meditating or writing in a journal to express your feelings.

- **Eat healthy foods.**

Get lots of fruits and vegetables to keep your system in good shape.

Every day

eat from each food group

listed in the pregnancy and breastfeeding food guide at <http://www.mypyramid.gov/>.



Couples can reconnect by creating routines at the end of the day.

You're tired; you're hungry and you have a long list of things to do. You and your partner may be short on energy and patience at the end of a long day, especially now that your baby is almost here. Even though there is a lot to do, what is most important is for the two of you to reconnect and feel the warmth of being loved.

Try these ideas to reconnect at the end of the day:

- Create your own "Hello" routine such as a kiss and saying, "Tell me about your day."
- Give each other a 3-minute back rub while talking about the day.
- Mentally shift gears from work to home by changing from work clothes to casual clothes.
- Take about 10-15 minutes to adjust to being home before starting dinner. Sit down and talk with your partner.
- Make work phone calls before arriving home and avoid taking time away from your partner.



This is especially important if you are a single parent or if you are expecting twins. Any help you can get to cope with the extra workload will make it easier for you. It will give you time to relax, nap, take a walk, or talk with a friend.

If friends and relatives would like to "shower" you with help, ask them to sign up for things you can count on. Maybe you can arrange for a different person to prepare dinner each night the first week you come home. What other things

could people help with...shopping, vacuuming, laundry, a week's worth of diapers?

Has your partner considered taking time off work? If you do not expect to have many people around to help, prepare some meals in advance and freeze them. Have plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables and sandwich type foods in the refrigerator, ready to eat.

Make plans to be good to yourself after the baby is born.

Think about how you're going to care for yourself after the birth. Having a baby is hard work. You may be able to ask a close relative or friend to stay with you for a few hours or even a few days when you come home with your new baby.

Your baby's prenatal development in the third and last trimester

Prenatal Month 7

- Baby is 14-18 inches long
- Weighs 3-4 pounds
- Looks very red and wrinkled
- Baby is beginning to store iron for the months after birth
- Brain is still growing fast
- Lungs are developing and bones are hardening
- Hand grip is so strong that he could support his whole weight
- Future mom's average weight gain is 3-4 pounds

Prenatal Month 8

- Baby is 16-20 inches long
- Weighs 4-6 pounds
- Baby is putting on a protective layer of fat
- Baby is still storing iron for the months after birth
- Baby is beginning to develop some protection from disease
- Baby's brain is still growing fast
- Future mom's average weight gain is 3-4 pounds

Prenatal Month 9

- Baby is 19-22 inches long
- Weighs 6-9 pounds
- Baby is still storing iron
- Baby's skin is coated with a creamy coating
- Head bones are soft
- Brain is still growing
- Future mom's average weight gain is 3-4 pounds

Pregnant moms may not feel their baby move as much in the last trimester.

During the last trimester or the seventh, eighth, and ninth months of pregnancy, babies gain almost five pounds and grow about seven inches. Because of this growth, your baby will have less room to move around in your abdomen, so you probably will not feel as much movement as you did in the second trimester. The baby also moves into its birth position, so you may notice the baby moving lower in your abdomen.

This change in position could relieve some pressure on your lungs and ribcage. In the last weeks of pregnancy, your baby's growth will slow down. Most babies will move into an upside-down position in preparation for moving through the birth canal. Best wishes for healthy labor and delivery!

Give yourself time and patience in becoming a parent.

Have you grown up believing that when you become a parent you would automatically know what to do and love doing it every minute of the day?

This is the myth of the perfect parent. It implies that we are all born knowing how to care for and raise our children, and that we should never feel negative emotions about parenting.

It takes time, practice, patience and experience to become a good parent. Expect to have times when you feel insecure, frustrated, resentful and confused.



Plan how you will get to the hospital.

When your delivery date gets close, be sure to plan how you're going to get to the hospital and how long it will take to get there. Do a practice trip beforehand, especially when the traffic is heavy. Then you can feel safe that you will know how long it will take to get to the hospital.

Keep a list of key phone numbers near your home phone or program them into your cell phone:

- Your doctor or clinic
- Emergency number at the hospital (in case you need someone in a hurry on a weekend or late at night)
- Friend or relative who will help take you to the hospital if your partner is not there when you go into labor

Future dads: Help the mom-to-be by talking and listening to her feelings.

It's almost time for your baby to arrive and your partner probably can't wait until delivery time. You may be wondering how you can help her. She is probably tired, uncomfortable, and may have no interest in sex. Emotionally, she may feel very dependent on you and impatient. You both are probably a little afraid about taking care of the new baby.

How can you help?

- Stay in contact with her throughout the day.
- Talk with her about how she is feeling.
- Offer to give her a back rub.
- Compliment her.
- Help prepare the house for the new arrival.
- Stay nearby because you never know when it might be time!

Mucous discharge, contractions, and water breaking are signs that labor is starting.

Signs that labor will begin soon:

- **Discharge of the mucous plug** is one sign that labor will begin within 24 hours. You will see mucous with a small amount of blood on your underwear. This pinkish thing has kept your uterus sealed and protected from germs during pregnancy. Its loss means your cervix is getting softer and thinner in preparation for delivery.
- **Bag of water breaks.** Sometimes the first sign of labor is water coming from the vagina — either in a slow trickle or a great gush. The water bag (which is called the amniotic sac) that your baby has been in during pregnancy breaks or leaks. If this happens, call your doctor or clinic. You and your baby are now open to infection. When your water breaks, you should be in active labor in 24 hours.
- **Contractions.** Labor often starts with contractions. What do they feel like? There is no one answer. Contractions may feel like strong menstrual cramps, gas pains, a backache, or a tightening feeling that comes and goes. Some women feel practice contractions during the last month of pregnancy.

To know if you're feeling the real thing or if it's just a warm up for the real thing, try changing your activity. If you have been moving around, lie down or take a bath. If you were asleep, get up and walk. If the contractions continue to come, and are getting longer, stronger, or closer together, it is time to call your doctor or clinic.



The first stage of labor is usually the longest.

In the first stage of labor, the cervix stretches or dilates enough to let the baby's head pass through. You can be at home and usually have plenty of time to make phone calls and prepare for the birth before you need to go to the hospital.

- Contractions are fairly mild and far apart
- Can last hours or even days

When you find that it is difficult to continue activity or talk through contractions, you are in active labor.

These contractions:

- Come in a wave pattern
 - Begin slowly, gradually increase in strength, peak, and slowly fade away
 - Have a rest period before the next contraction begins

As labor progresses,

contractions come more often, last longer, feel stronger.

Relaxing between contractions will help keep you from becoming too tired.

You might feel:

- Leg cramps
- Numbness
- Nausea and vomiting
- Muscle tremors

You can help during labor by learning to breathe slowly.

Slow, deep breathing during contractions helps your body relax while your uterus does its work. Practice breathing exercises ahead of time. These can help you relax, feel more in control of what is happening, and help you regain energy between contractions. It is hard work to give birth. Why do you think they call it labor?

Try breathing in through your nose slowly, allowing your abdomen to rise, and let your breath out through a relaxed, slightly open mouth. As your first stage of labor continues, you may find your breath rising in your chest — but still take deep, regular breaths.

Do not breathe too quickly, but by all means breathe! Holding your breath will make the contractions more uncomfortable. Some women find that it helps to make sounds on the out breath as labor becomes harder.

Panting or blowing helps in the last stage of labor. Try to either pant or blow and see which works best for you.

To pant:

- Relax your body
- Drop your jaw
- Breathe in through your mouth until you feel the air hitting the back of your throat
- Breathe out

To blow:

- Breathe air in through your mouth
- Purse your lips and imagine you're blowing out a birthday candle a few inches from your face
- Regularly space breaths at about 3-4 per second

Do not pant or blow too fast or too deeply — or you may hyperventilate and get dizzy. Practice these breathing exercises ahead of time. They will take some work, since this is not the way you would normally breathe.



Get ready for labor and delivery.

The delivery of the baby and placenta are stage 2 and 3 of labor.

After the cervix has dilated completely, contractions will begin to push the baby down the birth canal. This stage can last 15 minutes to 3 hours. Many doctors will ask you to help push the baby out by having you bear down during a contraction. If you have not gotten any medication, you will have a tremendous urge to bear down at this point in your labor.

You can push from lots of positions, but most women are semi-sitting. Never lie flat and push because gravity is working against you. When a contraction begins, round your back, and take some deep breaths. As the contraction builds, hold your breath, drop your chin to your chest, and press down. When your breath runs out, lift your head, take another breath and repeat. Continue as long as your contraction lasts. Relax during contractions. If your baby is moving quickly, the doctor may not want you to push hard and will tell you when to pant or blow.

The last stage of labor will probably be quick.

The last stage of labor takes from 5 minutes to 1 hour. The placenta, which has nourished your baby throughout pregnancy, usually slips out without too much effort.

Every birth experience is different.

You may be disappointed if you decide what your birth experience is going to be like before it happens. If you have specific ideas about what you want or don't want at the birth, make sure your doctor knows and agrees to this in advance.

Remember, the goal is to bring your baby into the world in the healthiest way possible — for both mother and baby.





Your newborn may look red and wrinkled, but beautiful!

Do you expect your baby to be alert, adorable, and playful from day one? This is the myth of the perfect baby. Your expectations may have been influenced by seeing babies in magazines, on TV, or on labels of baby food products. These babies' heads are perfectly formed; they are alert, smiling and very responsive. This is the perfect baby...right? Wrong! These are pictures of 6-12 week old babies and that is why they may look so perfect.

What does a newborn look like? A normal looking infant has a red and wrinkled face, large head, and puffy looking eyes. Some newborns sleep a lot after their trip down the birth canal. Others are awake and hungry from the start. Each baby is different. Enjoy the discovery of what yours will be like.

Want to Learn More?

For more parenting info and updated links, visit www.extension.org/parenting.

If you have questions, contact your local Extension office.

Remember:

Every woman and every pregnancy is different. You might feel many of the physical signs of pregnancy — or you might not feel any of them. Pay attention to your body and if you have any reason to believe things are not right, call your doctor right away.

Credits: This newsletter is adapted from Extension Just In Time Parenting newsletters in California, Delaware, Georgia, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Tennessee, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico and Wisconsin.