

# Just in Time Parenting

## New parents feel excited, tired, and nervous.

Do you sometimes feel you will never sleep through the night again? Are you a little nervous about taking care of this helpless and demanding baby? Do you feel tired, but excited too? If you answer yes to any of these questions, then you are like most parents.



There are many changes that take place and new things to learn when you become a parent. There will be good times and bad times and you and your baby will survive them all.

Some fathers feel shy about touching and holding their new baby. Others are willing to try even if they feel like they don't know exactly what they're doing. Knowing how to care for a baby takes time and practice. Dads, give yourself a chance. Pretty soon you will feel like you've been a father your whole life.

## What it's like to be a newborn

- I need someone to love me, feed me, hold me, and play with me.
- I like to feel warm, but not hot. Watch for these signs that I'm too warm: sweating, damp hair, flushed cheeks, heat rash, rapid breathing.
- I don't like lots of noise.
- I like to be held gently and very close.
- I like to sleep a lot.
- I am hungry every few hours.
- I may be fussy and cry a lot.
- I am usually red and wrinkly.
- My head is large and my arms and legs are short.
- When you hold me, place your arm under my neck to help support my head.
- I keep my arms and legs curled up and my fists closed.
- My skin may be flaky.

## Newborns can already see, hear, taste, and smell.

### Newborns can see shortly after birth.

- They see best when objects are about 8 inches away from their face.
- They enjoy looking at adults.
- Newborns can see black and white and bright colors — like red and yellow.

### Newborns can hear.

- They react to sounds by blinking their eyes, waking from sleep, crying, or moving their whole body.
- They like hearing a human voice and will move in rhythm to talking or singing.

### Newborns can taste and smell.

- They like warm things better than cold ones.
- They can recognize your smell.

### Newborns are born with reflexes.

- Reflexes are behaviors that help babies survive and learn. Look for these reflexes in your baby. If you don't see these reflexes, tell your doctor.
- Stroke the corner of your baby's mouth. She will turn her head to root, looking for a nipple.
- Place a finger or nipple in your baby's mouth. She will suck.



- Press on the palm of your baby's hand and watch for her hand to close.
- Press on the ball of the foot and watch for her toes to flex.

### Newborns get used to what happens in their lives.

- They learn not to wake up to sounds that happen regularly.
- They stop paying attention to something that happens over and over again. They will pay attention to new things.

## Schedule baby's 1 week check-up.

Be sure your baby has the second newborn screening test. The first test was given in the hospital before your baby came home. The second test is done at the first well baby checkup, usually at 1 to 2 weeks of age. Call your clinic or doctor and make arrangements to get it done by the time your baby is 1-2 weeks old.

## What it's like to be a preemie

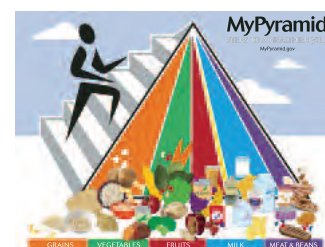
If your baby was born before the full 9 months of pregnancy, he is considered a premature baby. Premature babies catch up on their development, but are a little different than full term babies.

- My skin may be almost transparent and may change in color.
- I may be a little floppy because my muscles are not developed.
- I may be covered with a thin layer of hair.
- My outer ear may not be fully developed.
- I will look more like a full-term baby when I am 40 weeks old from the time the pregnancy began.
- I may not be able to suck, or I may have trouble sucking and swallowing at the same time.
- I may not cry very much. When I do cry it has a different sound than a full term baby.



## New parents can stay healthy by eating a variety of good foods and exercising.

New parents need to eat healthy foods so they can stay in their best shape to raise their new baby. Each day, eat several servings of whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and calcium-rich foods, such as milk, yogurt, and cheese. Cut down on fatty foods, sugar, and salt. If you are a breastfeeding mom, check the breastfeeding food guide at [www.mypyramid.gov/mypyramidmoms/index.html](http://www.mypyramid.gov/mypyramidmoms/index.html) for help in planning healthy meals. For moms and dads who are bottlefeeding, use the my pyramid food guide planner to help you plan healthy meals.



[www.mypyramid.gov/mypyramid/index.aspx](http://www.mypyramid.gov/mypyramid/index.aspx)

## Couples can develop different styles of housekeeping after the baby is born.

Babies bring change, both expected and unexpected. You may have expected and looked forward to the joy and love you would feel as a new parent. You may not have expected some of the feelings of stress and dissatisfaction that happened when your responsibilities and routines changed.

Babies create more household work. There's more laundry, picking up, general cleaning, and errands to do. Even if you're happy with who does the different jobs in your house, you might have to rethink things due to the

increased work. Couples are happier when their partners are willing to share the work. Create a plan so that each person knows what is expected in keeping up with household chores.

Allow for different ways of getting household tasks done. Your partner may not fold clothes the way you do, but try to go with the flow. Sharing tasks and not worrying about having a picture perfect home will help you survive the first months of parenthood.

## Pick up your crying infant and comfort him.

When you respond to your baby's cries, you are calming him and teaching him to trust you. A newborn usually cries a total of 2 to 3 hours a day. Premies may cry as much as 6 hours a day. Most babies have a fussy time each day.

It is stressful to parents when a baby cries, especially when he cries for a long time. But it is important to answer your baby's cries. Babies whose parents pick them up and comfort them cry less than babies who are ignored when they cry.

### What can you do to help your crying baby?

- Check to see if your baby is hungry, needs to be burped, needs a diaper change, or has a temperature and could be ill. Sometimes, infants cry when there is a lot of noise.
- Encourage your baby to calm down by himself. Help him find his thumb or pacifier. Some infants calm down to motions such as rocking, walking, or riding in a car or stroller.



- Try holding him and gently stroking his face or body.
- Try a variety of positions. Rather than holding him in your arms and looking at him, try sitting him in your lap facing away from you and give him your clean finger to suck on.
- Sometimes babies find it easier to relax if they are wrapped up or swaddled in a blanket. If you use a blanket, be sure your baby's face, nose and mouth are uncovered — so it is easy to breathe.
- Take your baby to a quiet, dim room and try to soothe him for about five minutes.
- If your baby doesn't stop crying and you are frustrated, try putting him in his crib and letting him cry. Let him cry for 10 to 20 minutes. Go out of the room for a moment and take some deep breaths. Remember it is not your fault your baby is crying. If you've put him down and he continues to cry, take a deep breath, pick him up, and try again.
- Plan who to ask for help if you get too tired or stressed out.

## Your baby learns by playing with you.

Your baby depends on you to play with her. Even at this young age, your baby will try to tell you that she wants to play. When she is giving you this message, be ready to play. The best time to play is when your baby is awake and alert. Her eyes will be open and bright, her face relaxed and alert, and her breathing regular. At the beginning you must "catch" these moments. They don't happen very often and they don't last long.

- A baby likes to look at faces. First, make eye contact. When the baby looks at you, begin to talk. Say, "Look at you. You're gorgeous!"
- If your baby continues to look at you, keep talking. If your baby stops looking at you and if you want to play some more, try to get her attention by changing the pitch or rhythm of your voice.
- Call her by name. When she looks at you again, make faces, smile, and laugh. Remember to stay about 8 inches from your baby's eyes. This is where she can see you best.

## Use a car safety seat to make each ride a safe ride.

Being in a car safety seat is the only safe place for an infant when in a car. Always put the infant safety seat in the car's back seat. **NEVER** put an infant in a car seat in the front seat.

If you have an accident, children are safer in the back seat. Most cars have front passenger side airbags and the force of the airbags can kill infants and small children.

Infants need to ride in the back seat — facing the back window of the car — until they reach at least two years of age or until they reach the highest weight or height allowed by their car safety seat's manufacturer.

More information can be found in the article, *Car Safety Seats: A Guide for Families* on the American Academy of Pediatrics web site.

Read the installation instructions for the car seat. Follow them to properly install the seat in your car. It is recommended that a nationally certified Child Passenger Safety Technician check your child's safety seat. Call your local highway patrol or fire station for information.



## Newborn babies develop their own regular feeding times.

Some babies may like to eat every 3 or 4 hours and some prefer eating more often than that. Newborn

babies drink only breast milk or formula. Keeping track of when your baby is hungry may give you an idea of your baby's feeding pattern. It may help to write down the times that your baby eats for several days to see what her pattern of eating is. Newborns change and grow quickly, so a flexible but regular schedule is best. Remember, your baby may not be hungry every time she is fussy. She may need burping, a diaper change, or may just want to be held.

## Breastfeeding is good for you and your baby.

Breastfeeding is a nutritious, healthy, and economical way of feeding your baby. It can take time for mom and baby to learn. Nurse whenever your baby shows that he is hungry — at least 8 times a day. Let your baby decide how long each feeding will be. Take your time to feed your baby. As you relax and as your baby sucks, your milk will flow. Being tense can slow down the natural flow of milk.

Be comfortable when you are nursing your baby. You can either sit or lie down, whichever is more comfortable for you. Have a place to put the items that you will need while you are nursing. Some mothers put these items in a basket; some keep everything on a table. Ask for help when you have questions or concerns about breastfeeding. A mother-to-mother support group can help answer your questions. Most hospitals have lactation consultants who can help you and your baby adjust to breastfeeding. The LaLeche League [www.la lecheleague.org](http://www.la lecheleague.org) is a useful breastfeeding resource.



## Use formula to bottle-feed.

If you have decided to bottle-feed your baby, or if you are unable to breastfeed, you will use formula. Formulas are designed to meet the nutritional needs of a growing baby. Discuss with your doctor whether your baby should have an iron-fortified formula or not.

Formula comes in three different forms:

- powdered
- concentrated
- ready-to-feed

Follow instructions carefully. Use a measuring cup to measure the water to be mixed into the powdered or concentrated formulas. Make sure that bottles and nipples are washed and clean before using.

If you think your baby is allergic to the formula, talk with your doctor so it can be changed. When you feed your baby, keep the nipple full of formula so she doesn't swallow air. Hold your baby close with her head up. Don't leave your baby

alone with the bottle propped up, and don't put her to bed with a bottle because your baby could choke on the milk.

## How much milk is enough for your newborn?

Your newborn is getting enough breast milk or formula if he:

- Wets 6 or more diapers every day after 4 days of age.
- Has yellow stools or frequent dark stools after 4 days of age.
- Looks and acts satisfied after feedings.
- Gains weight and grows longer. During the first few days of life, babies lose some weight, but after about 10 days, they start gaining weight again and double their birth weight by 5 months of age.

## Back to sleep!

Put your baby to sleep on his back to prevent sudden infant death syndrome.

- Do not use soft bedding – such as waterbeds, soft mattresses, pillows, blankets or stuffed animals. Your baby cannot move them if they get on his face and he will not be able to breathe.
- Use a firm mattress, and clothe your baby in a one-piece sleeper outfit to keep him warm while sleeping.
- The Back to Sleep Campaign [www.nichd.nih.gov/sids/](http://www.nichd.nih.gov/sids/) has information on SIDS.

### WARNINGS:

- Do not cover your child with blankets. Put him in a one-piece sleeper outfit to keep him warm.
- Keep the room at a comfortable temperature for an adult.
- Your baby only needs a crib with a mattress with a fitted sheet.
- Never use a pillow.
- Do not place an infant on an adult waterbed. Your child could suffocate!

## Talk to someone you trust if you get the baby blues.

During the first weeks after your baby is born, you may feel depressed or find yourself crying for no reason. This can happen to mothers and fathers, and may be the let down most of us feel after a long-awaited event has come and gone. There is also the worn-down feeling that follows any sudden change in schedule — like those 2 a.m. feedings. Many parents have these feelings.

You will recover your energy and good humor. In the meantime, keep your days as simple as possible.

- Only do what you have to do.
- Don't expect a great deal of yourself.
- Accept help from other people.
- Plan to nap when your baby does.
- Be flexible.

When you are having a rough time:

- Talk to your partner, a family member, or a good friend about your feelings. It helps to talk with someone close to you.
- Find groups in your community where parents get together to talk and work out solutions to common problems.
- If nothing seems to help and this goes on for several weeks, call your doctor. For some people, medical help is needed.



## Parents need coping skills when a child is born with a disability.

In a world where many conditions can be cured, it is hard to accept that a baby may have a condition that can be treated, but not cured. The news is shocking and brings feelings of anger, sadness, anxiety, fear and depression. The anger can be directed at those who bring the bad news, such as doctors and nurses. Parents may also be angry at family and friends for what they see as a lack of support and understanding.

Being a new parent is a challenge in itself, but being the parent to a baby with special needs is even more overwhelming! Parents and friends will experience many emotions. Emotions are healthy reactions to difficult situations. These emotions will not disappear. It is important that parents accept their feelings and use coping skills — such as talking with other parents who have been through this — managing stress, and setting realistic goals.

## Give your new baby a chance to move.

- Your baby needs to be placed in a variety of positions to develop strong muscles.
- When your baby is awake, let him have time to lie on his back and his stomach.
- Let him sit in an infant chair.
- Give him something to look at and soon he will be able to lift his chin and then his whole head.
- Let him sit on your lap and against your body, facing out so that he can see what is happening in the room.

## Want to Learn More?

For more parenting info and updated links, visit [www.extension.org/parenting](http://www.extension.org/parenting).

If you have questions, contact your local Extension office.

### Remember:

- Every baby is different. Children may do things earlier or later than described here.
- This newsletter gives equal space to both sexes. If he or she is used, we are talking about all babies.

*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.*



Text4baby will send free text messages to your cell phone with health tips for you and your baby. *It's all free!* To sign up, text **BABY** to **511411** or go to <http://www.text4baby.org/>

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Newborn