

Learn How to Minimize Stress as a New Parent

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A new baby brings a major transition screaming into your life. Even if it's not your first child, it can be a difficult adjustment.

We might see Facebook friends posting baby pictures in which everyone wears coordinated outfits and looks perfect, but that's rarely the reality of having a newborn.

These 10 guidelines can help new parents and parents-to-be manage stress amid the real-life challenges of a baby:

Before baby

1. Figure out parental leave

For many couples, it's best to have one partner's leave divided over a long period rather than taken in one block – they could take one or two days off per week for a few months, instead of staying home every day.

Different employers offer different options for leave, so carefully consider how to make parental leave work best for you.

2. Say yes to help

Now is the time to accept every form of help – from the ninth month of pregnancy through the first six postpartum months, especially.

If a neighbor offers to drop off some lasagna, for example, the correct response is “That would be amazing, thank you.”

Moms also should practice asking their partners for help. Learning to use your voice and be specific is crucial now – partners may want to help and are afraid of doing something wrong or overreaching.

If accepting help makes you feel uncomfortable, think of this as helping the baby by maintaining your health. No one gets extra points for reaching this finish line without support.

3. Establish mental health care, if needed

A history of anxiety or depression puts you at an increased risk of anxiety or postpartum depression later.

You aren't doomed, but knowledge is power. Establish a relationship with a therapist or psychiatrist now, and discuss your mental health history.

If you do experience anxiety or depression symptoms and need psychological help later, you won't be making appointments and meeting new doctors while you're suffering.

After baby

4. Shower, get dressed and go outside every day

It seems simple, right? But these tasks can feel insurmountable with a newborn.

Hygiene is vital for health, and it can be therapeutic to let warm water run over achy muscles. When your clothes become a canvas for milk, pee and poop stains, it's important to change into a clean outfit – even just from one pair of sweatpants to another.

A clean body and fresh clothes also make you more likely to go outside. Whether it's for a walk in the neighborhood or to the cafe for a latte, breathing fresh air and feeling the ground beneath your feet can re-familiarize yourself with regular life

after the animalistic process of giving birth.

It doesn't matter if you separate these tasks by nine hours or only get around to showering at 4 p.m. You'll feel more human.

5. Make sleep a priority

Getting four consecutive hours of sleep is key to a sense of well-being.

This can be difficult for breastfeeding mothers, especially, but if a partner does one or two feedings each night, mom can get a good stretch of shut-eye.

Some couples like to alternate nights sleeping in baby's room, providing care throughout the night. Being away from baby all night can provoke anxiety in some mothers, though, so test what works for you.

6. Sleep while baby sleeps – if you want to

"Sleep while baby sleeps" is a popular mantra, but it's not for everyone. Feeling obligated to sleep before you're ready can create more anxiety than rest.

I tell patients to do something you enjoy when the baby sleeps, to maintain self-care. Lying down during that time is great, but you could read, call a friend, watch TV or prepare a snack – just don't do laundry or other chores, if possible.

7. Partners: Monitor the new mom

Moms can be laser-focused on their newborns. The best gift a partner can give to her is an extra set of eyes to make sure she's eating enough, caring for herself, staying mentally healthy and isn't feverish or in pain. Encourage her to call her obstetrician when necessary

8. Avoid major life decisions

Sleep deprivation makes some situations look unsolvable. Don't make any decisions about moving, quitting jobs, ending friendships, divorcing or severing family ties within the first six months of baby's life.

Good sleep and returning to a routine can make these problems more manageable.

9. Make a return-to-self game plan

Babies don't have to change everything. If you were an avid runner before, start jogging as soon as your doctor says it's OK. If you loved to read, carve out some time for yourself and a book.

Create a plan for returning to some hobbies within the first three postpartum months so that you can stay connected to who you are. You might have less uninterrupted time for hobbies as a parent, but you're still you.

10. Monitor postpartum depression symptoms

Know the signs of postpartum depression, especially if mom has a history of depression.

Symptoms include lack of enjoyment in life, crying a lot for no reason, feeling hopeless and feeling like a terrible mother. If these feelings creep up, call your obstetrician's office – they know what to do and can put patients in touch with resources.

POEM (Perinatal Outreach and Encouragement for Moms) offers support in central Ohio, but its [website](#) offers excellent online resources wherever you are.

Moms2B helps central Ohio's new moms and infants stay safe and healthy