

For Dads: Bringing Home a Newborn

When first-time dads prepare, taking care of the new baby becomes less overwhelming BY SARAH LEBO

Congratulations, you are now a father! Now what?

You are bringing your little bundle of joy home from the hospital and you may be feeling overwhelmed and even confused by what lies before you. Fortunately, there are a several things you can do to make yourself feel more involved in this new experience. Keep in mind all dads (and moms) need practice to learn childcare skills. New moms are a bit ahead of the game because they've spent many hours on their own with the baby during pregnancy; however, you can fall into step caring for your baby now as you make the transition from hospital to home.

Bonding

Getting to know a baby, like all new relationships, takes time. During these early days it may feel somewhat awkward to hold your tiny baby, but this is the best way to connect with your new child. Newborns simply like human touch, and the more you hold them and talk to them, the more they'll get used to you. You offer a different kind of comfort for your baby that only you can provide as his or her dad.

The best way for you to learn what the baby needs and how he or she communicates with you is by directly caring for the infant. Try to watch, hold, comfort and care for the baby as much as possible. This helps you to know the baby's "language" or his or her needs. The best way for you to talk to a baby is in soft, gentle tones. They like to hear a calm voice full of comfort and support.

One easy way to bond with your baby is to do work in the house or yard with the newborn in a baby carrier on your chest or your back. Babies love being close to their parent's warm body. This can provide reassurance and allow him or her to have bonding time with you while you get some things done around the house.

And even though your baby's tiny body seems almost scary to touch, you can "play" with them through regular physical contact,



singing to them and even rocking or slowly dancing with them.

Do not shake the baby for any reason. If you need to wake the baby for feeding, tickle his or her feet or blow gently on their cheek. Be careful at all times to support your baby's head and neck by cradling the head with your hand when carrying your baby or supporting it when laying him or her down.

Sharing Responsibility

Couples can get the most rest and meet the baby's needs best when they take turns with everyday responsibilities. Tasks like giving bottles, bathing and diaper changing, as well as holding baby during a difficult night, can be handled by parents on a rotating basis. This will help your baby understand comfort comes from both mom and dad.

Patience is very important during this time of change. Relax. After a little practice you will feel a lot better about being a new father.

You'll also need patience when your new baby cries sometime without any reason you can think of. Just try to figure out what's going on. Is the baby hungry? Does he need a clean diaper? Does she just need some cuddle time? Don't give up when the going gets tough and simply hand the baby over to mom — this is a common mistake. As long as the baby's basic needs are covered, this can be a chance for your baby to learn to trust you for comfort, to learn your smell, the sound of your voice and the feeling of being held by you.

Bringing a newborn home and trying to meet all her needs can seem like an overwhelming task. Try to take things one day at a time and focus on what's needed right now, rather than worrying about how the night or tomorrow will go. These initial challenges of fatherhood will soon turn into joys that will bring you, your baby and your family closer together. n

Sources:

www.ehow.com/how_2078576_help-dad-bond-newborn.html
www.theparentszone.com/parenting-tips/responsibilities-of-new-father-when-newborn-enters-into-the-life/
www.planningfamily.com/babies/bringing-baby-home/handling-a-newborn/
www.dad.info/kids/babies/hanging-out-with-a-newborn/
www.dad.info/fatherhood/the-biggest-myths-about-dads/

Sarah Lebo is a freelance writer for *ADVANCE*.