



# Becoming Parents

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Your baby will be born with a natural need to feel attached to you.

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*All parents want to do their best. What matters is that most of the time, when your baby needs you and especially if she is upset, hurt or sick, you try to comfort her.*

## Falling in Love with Your Baby

Many parents have a sense of joy at birth and feel an immediate and powerful attachment with their new baby. For some, the attachment process may take longer, possibly due to fatigue, stress and other personal factors.

The first few weeks are often exhausting and new parents question if they're doing the right thing. You will be amazed that even when it's difficult, your top priority is the care, nurturing and safety of your baby 24 hours a day.

Your days will feel full with routine baby care – enjoy this time with your baby by including eye contact, talking and singing, playing with fingers and toes, playing peek-a-boo, lots of cuddles and hugs. Soon your baby will reward you with smiles and happy sounds.

## How will you meet your baby's emotional needs?

- Comfort him when he cries.
- Hold your baby skin-to-skin.
- Use gentle rocking motions to soothe her.
- Use soft touch and warm cuddles often.
- Make eye contact and smile.
- Talk to her and respond to her baby sounds.
- Sing, read, make funny faces and sounds, play peek-a-boo.
- Feed her, keep her clean, dry, warm and safe. Comforting your baby when she needs you will make her feel loved and respected and will not spoil her.
- As you get to know your baby, you will learn the signals that tell you when she needs you. You will also learn to recognize when she is content looking at her toes...or at the world around her, knowing you are nearby.
- A secure attachment between baby and caregiver develops over time.

Pregnancy and the first few years of your baby's life are a critical time for healthy brain development. All the care and interactions that meet your baby's physical and emotional needs will also help develop her brain.



*Comfort, Play & Teach: Practical, easy to do activities and information to help you support your child's development. Brought to you by Infant Mental Health Promotion and the Phoenix Centre for Children and Families.*

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Focus on your amazing new baby and you will continue to learn more about parenting as time goes on.

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Through play, babies and children learn motor skills, problem solving and ways to get along with others. Play helps to build the strong attachment needed for lifelong healthy development.

Visit an [EarlyON Child & Family Centre](#) in your area to learn more about creative play and meet other parents.

## Involved Fathers (or Father Figures) Make a Difference

Pregnancy is perceived to be mainly “a mom thing”. It’s true that children with responsive mothers are simply more resilient: more likely to become well-adjusted, emotionally healthy adults and have fewer problems with anxiety, depression and loneliness.

However, having children is not just a woman’s job. The role of the father goes far beyond emotional and physical support during pregnancy and childbirth.

Fathers have an enormous impact on their entire family.

**Studies show that children who have positive involvement with their fathers (or father figure):**

- Get along better with siblings and peers.
- Are better problem solvers.
- Have more initiative and communicate more effectively.
- Are more likely to have success in school and career.
- Are less likely to become involved in harmful behaviours such as substance abuse or criminal activity.

### How do you plan to be an involved dad once your baby is born?

There are many ways to be an involved dad:

- Snuggle skin-to-skin.
- Burp her, change diapers.
- Give your baby a bath.
- Play with her – smile, sing, read.
- Take her for a walk.
- Make meals/clean up after.
- Do housework/laundry.
- Provide for your family financially.

Parenting is a learning experience. Sometimes fathers feel like they don’t know what to do – especially around new babies. All new parents need time to get to know their baby. Over time parents learn when and how to calm or stimulate their baby. Every baby is unique.



*Dads, just like moms, get better with practice.*

New fathers often assume that mothers instinctively know how to care for their baby. Mothers are learning too. Because women spend so much time initially with their babies, they tend to become confident in baby care first. Once mothers figure out strategies that work to care for their babies, they often expect fathers to provide care in the identical manner. There is often more than one way to do the job well.

Newborn babies may sometimes seem to prefer being with their moms. This is a natural first stage of attachment. Yet, even during this time, a father's regular involvement in his baby's care will help them develop a warm loving relationship. If your baby prefers to be held by mom, take a slow approach. Pass your baby from mom to dad gradually. Give your baby time to feel comfortable and get used to being held by dad.

A mother who takes over or is critical of a father's efforts in baby care closes the gate to his involvement. Even when a dad wants to be involved, he might be discouraged. When a mother is encouraging to her partner, she opens this gate.

**More information:** Dad Central: [www.dadcentral.ca](http://www.dadcentral.ca)

## Your Relationship – Intimacy and Sex

### During Pregnancy

Hormonal levels fluctuate rapidly and may affect your desire for intimacy at different stages of pregnancy.

Although you may not always feel like having sex, there are many other ways to have an intimate and loving relationship. Talk about your feelings and explore other ways to be intimate.

- During the early stage of pregnancy it is common to have less energy, as well as breast tenderness and/or nausea and vomiting, which may lower your sexual desire.
- During the middle three months many of these earlier discomforts may disappear and sexual feelings may return or even increase.
- In the last weeks of pregnancy, physical discomforts like increased size, fatigue and breathlessness may make sexual intercourse less comfortable.

Even though the frequency of intercourse may have decreased, there is still a great need for physical contact, such as hugging and cuddling.

Partners may also experience some emotional changes. They may not want to have sex, fearing that it may start labour or harm the baby. In most cases sexual intercourse is safe during pregnancy.

**Sexual intercourse may not be recommended if:**

- You have signs of [preterm labour](#).
- You have vaginal bleeding.
- Your cervix is opening early.
- You have placenta previa (placenta over the cervix).
- You are pregnant with more than one baby.
- Check with your doctor/ midwife if you have concerns.

## After Your Baby Is Born

It is normal to experience changes in your romantic and sexual relationship in the weeks and months following the birth of your baby. It is still important to spend time together as a couple.

**Spontaneity often decreases but planning ahead for time together is fun too.**

- Be flexible and creative.
- Keep your sense of humour.
- Plan activities you both enjoy.
- Try to include your new baby into your personal interests and outings.

Interest in sex may also change after the birth of a baby. Share how you're feeling and what will help each of you enjoy being intimate. Fatigue is a major deterrent and the best time for sex may no longer be at night.

- Take turns resting and sleep when your baby sleeps.
- Accept help from family and friends until your energy returns.
- In the meantime, find other ways to express your love and emotions.

Sexual intercourse can resume when both partners feel ready, when mom has seen her health care provider for her six-week check-up and a [birth control](#) method is chosen.

For breastfeeding women, it is important to consider any [possible effects](#) a birth control method may have on quality and quantity of breastmilk.

The [lactational amenorrhea method](#) allows women to rely on breastfeeding as an effective method of birth control. However, certain conditions must exist to make this method effective.

**More information:**

Breastfeeding and Birth Control: <http://kellymom.com/bf/can-i-breastfeed/meds/birthcontrol/>

Lactational Amenorrhoea Method: <http://www.waba.org.my/resources/lam/>

## Life Together With Baby

**Suggested topics of conversation for a prenatal date night. Enjoy!**

- Characteristics I appreciate about my partner as a person
- Qualities my partner has that will make him/her a good parent
- Ways to spend time as a couple after our baby is born
- Wishes and hopes for our growing family



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Did you know that...  
50% of pregnancies are  
unplanned?

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## Planning Ahead

Congratulations – you’re almost there.

During the last weeks of your pregnancy and early days of parenting your focus is not likely to be on your next pregnancy.

However this may be a good time for you and your partner to think about and discuss your family’s future.

- Are you planning for more children?
- How many? How many years apart?

Decisions about child spacing are very personal and depend on many factors. It is important to give yourself time to recover from this pregnancy and childbirth and to develop the relationship with your new baby.

If you know you do not want to become pregnant again soon, it is important to discuss your birth control options with your partner and your health care provider.

**More information:** Birth Control: [www.sexandu.ca](http://www.sexandu.ca)

## Research Tells Us:

### Folic Acid

Folic acid taken before and during the first month of pregnancy can help reduce the risk of neural tube defects by 70%.

- Neural tube develops during the first 4 weeks of pregnancy (before many women know they are pregnant).
- All women who are sexually active and of childbearing age should take a multivitamin every day that includes folic acid 0.4 mg.

### Building Healthy Sperm

- Men’s health is just as important as their partners’ when it comes to conceiving a healthy baby.
- Preparing your mind and body for pregnancy makes a big difference in the well-being of your future children.
- Alcohol use may affect sperm formation and function and may cause impotence.

**More information:**

Folic Acid: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/pregnancy/folic-acid.html>

Preconception Health: [www.beststart.org/resources/preconception/index.html](http://www.beststart.org/resources/preconception/index.html)