

During these first few weeks at home, mom will be sore, exhausted, stressed, and emotional. She's going to need to rest and heal, so that she can be her best for the baby. Good thing she's got you! **You are both highly important to the health and happiness of mom and baby.**

Three Important Questions

1. What is postpartum and how does it impact mom, dad, and baby?
2. How can I best support mom?
3. What is my role as a dad?

What's postpartum and how does it impact each of you?

Postpartum simply means, "after birth". This period lasts for six to eight weeks and it's a really important time for mom, baby, and you! You learn, or relearn, how to take care of a newborn, and how to adjust to your new normal as a family.

It's a time for healing. During postpartum, mom's body is returning to normal. She's also recovering from a major medical procedure. This is probably going to be hard for her. While she recovers, she'll need lots of rest and help. It's also a difficult emotional time. She might feel anxious or have difficulty sleeping. She may cry a lot or her emotions might jump around. All of this is normal.

Postpartum will have an impact on you, too. **Your schedule runs on "infant-time" now.** You will experience a shift in your responsibilities and your relationship with mom will change. You will probably feel a new sense of purpose.

How can you best support her?

Rule number one on supporting mom during postpartum is helping take care of the baby.¹ You both need to know what you're expected to do. Talk with mom, and when setting expectations, remember:

- **Step-Up!** Do your share (plus more). The house and baby aren't all her job. Chores are opportunities to create a clean, safe, and healthy environment for your new baby. And, to establish routines that will help your family as your child grows and begins to model their behavior after yours.
- **Be Pro-active!** Don't make her remind you to do all the little things. Create a system – checklists, alarms, schedules, reminders; whatever works best for you and mom.
- **Follow-thru!** Do what you promise. Your whole new family will respect you and feel more confident when they know that you come thru on things you say you will do.

Another key to supporting her is being responsive. You can't plan for everything.

1. **Be present.** Don't just sit in the corner. Pay attention to her and the baby, learn their routine and be a part of it!
2. **Act.** Look for ways to help and just do it.
3. **Be understanding.** She's going to need lots of rest and will have emotional ups and downs. She'll need you for support.
4. **Be excited!** Your life will never be the same! Make sure to enjoy the adventure with her.

What is your role as a dad?

We all have different roles. At home, with friends, at work. They help define us. You've just been given your biggest role in life - dad. That means taking care of mom and helping care of your baby. Let's break down your role into three main areas: Protector, Provider, Encourager

- **Protector:** Make your family's health and safety your priority. Do what you can to make sure your home is safe and secure. That could mean checking smoke alarms and fire extinguishers, choking hazards, installing outlet covers, and/or repairs to things that can hurt your child as they begin to move around in the next few months.
- **Provider:** Make sure your family's needs are met. Your finances impact everything. Do your part to make sure mom and baby have healthy food options, clean water, and all their important needs met. That may mean some temporary sacrifices for things you'd like for yourself.
- **Encourager:** Make sure mom knows how good she's doing! She needs you to be her biggest cheerleader during these first few weeks. Mistakes will be made by everyone. That's ok and that's normal. Be the voice of encouragement and understanding. Admit when you mess up. Do better, next time. You've got this! Make sure she knows that you know that.

Remember, other than nursing, dads can do everything moms can! **Feeding, diapers, rocking, singing, holding your baby**- You can learn and enjoy all of these new fatherhood experiences.

Emotional Support: Mom may have extra emotional needs during the first few weeks after birth. Four out of five mothers feel a down period, called the "baby blues". One out of five develop postpartum depression. **Here's the difference** :^{2,3,4}

Baby Blues: Hormone changes and lack of sleep create mood swings, crying, sadness and feelings like she can't handle motherhood. These usually stop within two weeks. It's normal, but feels like an emotional roller-coaster for mom.

Postpartum Depression: If symptoms last longer than two weeks, she feels overwhelming sadness, sleeps all day, can't sleep at all, or loses her appetite, she may have a form of depression. If it's interfering with her life, seek professional assistance.

Step up to new challenges. Be Pro-active when supporting your family. Follow-Up and be a great role model for your child. Don't forget to take care of yourself along the way by getting as much rest as possible, eating healthy, and exercising to be at your best.

You'll learn more about yourself than you could ever imagine. And, you'll look back on life many years down the road and realize that this crazy roller coaster ride was so worth it! Have fun, make it count, and go be the dad you want to be!

Resources:

1. Johnshopkinshealthcare.staywellsolutionsonline.com. 2021. The New Mother: Taking Care of Yourself After Birth. [online] Available at: <<https://johnshopkinshealthcare.staywellsolutionsonline.com/interactivetools/calculators/90,P02693>> [Accessed 29 September 2021].
2. Health, Davis. "The Importance of Infant Bonding | UC Davis Medical Center." Ucdavis.edu, 2011, health.ucdavis.edu/medicalcenter/healthtips/20100114_infant-bonding.html.
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4. "Default - Stanford Children's Health." Www.stanfordchildrens.org, www.stanfordchildrens.org/en/topic/default?id=caring-for-the-mother-physically-and-emotionally-85-P01226&sid=.