

# This is Your (Soon-to-be) Life

A sneak peek at life after baby for parents-to-be. Presented by Ann Douglas

## Four Essential Truths About Becoming a Mother



**ONE:** Only supermodels (and their biological equivalents) shed their baby weight by the six-week checkup. So don't hold yourself up to the same weight loss standards as the supermodel set unless you're also prepared to start speed-dialing the therapists of the rich and famous. **TWO:** Your partner is not "the enemy". It just feels that way at 3 am. It's easy to convince yourself that your partner is ignoring your baby's middle-of-the-night cries, just so he can snatch a few more minutes of uninterrupted sleep. But before you write him off as a selfish swine, hear this. Scientists have discovered that dads simply don't hear babies'

cries in the night as well as moms do. Of course, you can help him to hear better by giving him a gentle poke or prod. That may be one of the evolutionary purposes of the maternal elbow. **THREE:** Time doesn't move at a predictable speed once you've become a parent. There are days when time seems to be moving backwards and days when it zooms ahead faster than you can tear off the pages on your calendar. S-l-o-w d-o-w-n, speedup, s-l-o-w d-o-w-n, speedup: it reminds you of the way your Slinky used to flip-flop down the stairs when you were a child, gathering up speed and taking on a life of its own. **FOUR:** Every mom needs time off for good behavior. Whether you take your time off across town, around the corner, or in your bathtub with the door locked is up to you. (Not every new mom wants to venture too far away from her baby, after all.) But taking some sort of break from baby will give you the chance to recharge your maternal batteries and get reacquainted with your pre-baby self. (Remember her?)

## Your Body After Baby: Nutrition, Fitness, Self-Acceptance



**THE NEW YOU:** Accept the fact that you may end up with some permanent souvenirs from your pregnancy. You may have a few stretch marks and you may find that your body shape is different than it was prior to pregnancy, even after you lose your pregnancy weight. • Don't put an overwhelming amount of pressure on yourself to lose your pregnancy weight overnight. Remember that Mother Nature intends for you to have an extra five to seven pounds of fat reserves stockpiled for milk production purposes and some new moms find that she'll stubbornly safeguard this stockpile until they quit breast-feeding. How quickly you lose your remaining pregnancy weight will be determined by how much

you gained during pregnancy and such factors as your eating habits, how much you exercise, and your metabolism. Some new moms find that they lose weight at a steady rate while they are breast-feeding. Others find that

their weight remains stable. A few find that they actually gain weight because they are quite hungry while they are breast-feeding. While crash dieting is definitely out for new moms (you need your energy to make breast-milk and to care for your new baby) a combination of healthy eating, regular exercise, and stress reduction generally works well. • Find a fitness routine that meshes well with your lifestyle as a new mom. • Remind yourself that healthy self-esteem is a key ingredient in nurturing your body and achieving full wellness; and make sure you're treating that body with the kindness and respect that it deserves.

## The Fatherhood Files



### WHAT EVERY NEW MOM NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT NEW DADS:

The postpartum period can be a challenging time for every member of the new family, including new dads. Not only is the new dad required to pick up a lot of slack on the home-front while you're busy with the new baby: he's simultaneously trying to sort out what it means to be someone's dad. Add to that the fact that everyone who walks through the front door makes a huge fuss over you and the new baby, the fact that he's likely shouldering some financial worries, and the fact that he's trying to figure out whether his sex life has gone permanently AWOL, and you can see that it's no picnic being a

new dad. So be kind to your partner. Sure, he may not be doing round-the-clock breast-feeding duty, but he's going through his own series of adjustments right now. If you want him to provide you with the emotional support you need to weather the postpartum roller coaster ride, be prepared to return the favor.

**12:** The percentage of fathers who show symptoms of depression by the mid-point of their partners' pregnancies. These symptoms typically persist until the early postpartum period. Fathers are more likely to become depressed if the mother is also experiencing depression or if the couple is experiencing relationship difficulties.

## What New Parents Argue About Most



**SURVEY SAYS:** So much about that theory about the kids bringing you closer together. Parents find plenty to argue about. A frequently cited study conducted in the early 1980s found that 90% of parents argue more often after the birth of a baby than they did before they had children. According to the British charity Relate, 14% of arguments between parents centre around money, 12% revolve around the kids, and 11% relate to household chores (who is or isn't doing their fair share). Other causes of conflict include concerns about the partner's behavior or drinking or the day-to-day things that drive us crazy about one another. **MONEY:** According to the Vanier

Institute of the Family, the average cost of raising a boy from birth to age 18 is approximately \$164,483, as compared to the approximately \$163,464 it costs to raise a girl. **WORK:** The total number of Canadian families with a stay-at-home parent has decreased significantly over the past 30 years, according to Statistics Canada. In 1976, more than half (54%) of two-parent families had a stay-at-home parent. Today, only one in five

(21%) have a stay-at-home parent. **STRESS:** 76 percent of mothers with young children report feeling permanently time-stressed, as compared to 66 percent of fathers with children the same age, according to Statistics Canada. **SEX:** How big is the “sex expectations gap” between moms and dads? Typically, moms would like to have sex once a week while dads would like to have sex four times per week. And during the early weeks after having a baby, “no sex” is a more realistic expectation. (Studies have shown that it takes most couples 7 to 8 weeks to start making love again and that the frequency of lovemaking drops by 40% during the year after childbirth.) It’s also important to know that couples can experience some sexual difficulties when they first start having sex again: for example, perineal tenderness, lack of lubrication (due to breast-feeding hormones: a problem easily remedied with artificial lubricants), leaky breasts, maternal/paternal exhaustion, interruptions from the baby, and maternal preoccupation with the baby. Those who have researched the impact of having a baby on a couple's relationship have concluded that frank and open communication, regular sex (even if it's just a quickie), and couple time are the keys to remaining emotionally and sexually connected during the early months and years of parenthood.

## Soothing Your Baby



- Work with—not against—your baby’s schedule.
- Respect your baby’s individual likes and dislikes.
- Get the rest you need so that you can cope with your baby’s demands.
- Consider your feeding techniques (breast and bottle).
- Try to recreate the uterine environment (think motion, warmth, and white noise).
- Provide skin-to-skin contact.
- Use soothing tones and handle your baby calmly.
- Practice infant massage. Realize that the amount of newborn crying tends to peak when your baby is about six weeks of age. Things will get better as he becomes more settled and tuned into his world.

## Helping Your Baby to Sleep



**ONE:** Ensure that the sleep environment you have provided for your child is sleep enhancing, not sleep hindering. **TWO:** Understand that there’s no one-size-fits-all sleep solution. Your job as a parent is to find the solution that's best for your family. When choosing between your various sleep-training options, you'll want to consider: the age and stage of your child, your child's temperament, any special circumstances concerning your child, your parenting style, the day-to-day realities of your family's situation. **THREE:** Consistency is key, but, flexibility is also important. (Yes, there are ways to have it both ways.) **FOUR:** When considering the right time to start sleep training decide if you are

dealing with a sleep concern (you're feeling worn down), a sleep problem (you feel a sense of urgency to resolve the problem, for the sake of yours and your child’s well-being) or a sleep emergency (you've reached the crisis point and things need to change right away). **FIVE:** You and your partner need to be on the same page when it comes to implementing your chosen sleep plan. Discuss your various options thoroughly until you can find some comfortable middle ground. **SIX:** Learn about the science of sleep and the pros and cons of various sleep-training methods. **SEVEN:** Line up some support. You can't function at your best when you're perpetually running on empty. So don't be afraid to give yourself a (sleep) timeout.

**STRANGE BUT TRUE:** Time spent in the maternity ward tends to be anything but restful. A study published in the *Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic, and Neonatal Nursing* found that a typical new mom receives 54 calls or visits, each lasting 17 minutes on average, during her hospital stay. This leaves her with just 24 9-minute stretches of uninterrupted time to spend with her partner and her baby.

## The Advice Department

**WHERE NEW PARENTS GO FOR ADVICE:** According to a study reported in the medical journal *Health Education Research*, a mom-to-be is most likely to turn to her healthcare provider, her pregnancy confidante (typically her mother or a close female friend or relative), or her partner for advice—in that order. A new dad, on the other hand, is overwhelmingly likely to turn to his partner for advice. A study published in the *Journal of Perinatal Education* found that 91.8% of expectant fathers seek advice from their partners; 37.1% from their mothers or mothers-in-law, 34.6% from other fathers; 24.4% from coworkers; 23.9% from nurses, 21.0% from doctors, and 15.6% from their fathers or fathers-in-law.



**ADVICE OVERLOAD:** Teach yourself to tune out unhelpful advice--particularly unhelpful advice of the random, unsolicited variety. You know your baby best. • Learn about infant development so you'll know what types of developmental milestones are typical for each age and stage. That way, you'll be able to filter out a lot of advice that is clearly off the mark. • At the same time, don't get so

obsessed with developmental milestones that you forget to enjoy who your baby is today. Babyhood zooms by quickly enough. You don't want to wish it away any more quickly by forever anticipating the next milestone.

**TIMEOUT:** Consider scheduling a babymoon (the term childbirth educator and author Sheila Kitzinger coined to describe time alone as a new family during the early days after the birth). • Limit the number of visitors during the early weeks of your baby's life. At the same time, accept any and all offers of help. • Find ways to stay connected to your partner despite the demands of early parenthood. • Learn to set priorities. Time with your baby and your partner matters; non-essential household chores can wait. • Be prepared to feel unprepared. It takes time to feel comfortable in your new role as someone's mom or dad.

Ann Douglas is the author of numerous books about pregnancy and parenting, including *The Mother of All Pregnancy Books* (2nd edition coming in June), *The Mother of All Pregnancy Organizers*, *The Mother of All Baby Books*, *The Mother of All Toddler Books*, *The Mother of All Parenting Books*, *Sleep Solutions for Your Baby, Toddler, and Preschooler*, *Mealtime Solutions for Your Baby, Toddler, and Preschooler*, *Choosing Childcare for Dummies*, and *The Unofficial Guide to Having a Baby*.

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