



A brave new postnatal world:

an essential guide to
motherhood



Having a baby is the start of an exciting new chapter in your life. Although you may come across unexpected (and unforgettable) challenges as a new parent, you will grow and develop as a person in ways you would never have expected before.

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This guide is here to help. It covers the changes you'll notice, the challenges you'll face and the adjustments every new parent has to adapt to in their brave new postnatal world. Your first year of motherhood is a learning curve like no other; this guide aims to give you some tips that will ensure you are fully prepared and ready to make the most of your baby's first year.

Get ready for your perspectives to change

Have you noticed feeling more anxious, overprotective or found yourself worrying more? Don't panic, this is entirely normal and experienced by pretty much every new mother.



Did you know?

These changes occur due to large neurological developments that take place in your brain.

These neurological changes act to increase activity in the parts of the brain that control:

- empathy
- anxiety
- social interaction

How this affects you

- You gain a whole new perspective of the word "tired"
- You will start seeing the world through the eyes of a child (which can be amazing at times and scary at others!)
- You will develop a whole new appreciation for your own parents
- Looking after yourself will become much more important to you, for your baby's sake

Don't be scared

The first year of your child's life is a time to embrace these new perspectives. There is no greater joy than introducing your child to things they have never seen before and watching them learn and develop with each new day.



A baby is born in the world every three seconds.



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Depending on your nutrition, activity levels, genetics and age it can take between 12 weeks and 12 months for you to feel ‘back to normal’ after giving birth.

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Developing talents you never knew you had



By the time you decide to have a baby, you may think that you know yourself, your skills and your weaknesses pretty well. Once your baby arrives, you'll discover a whole range of new talents you never knew you possessed.

Do you remember when you were young and it seemed like your mum was a superhero? Well, in reality, she probably had the exact same worries about looking after a newborn baby as you have. Babies don't come with a guidebook, and it's easy for new parents to feel overwhelmed at first.

Learning new skills

Like most things in life, it takes time. You will learn how to care for your baby and become more comfortable in your abilities as time goes on. Below are a few tips to help you out:



Holding your baby - It's easy for new parents to feel clumsy or nervous holding something that seems so small and delicate, but even newborns will make you aware if they are uncomfortable or unhappy.

Babies are unable to support their head with their neck muscles until they are around six months old, so make sure you always support this area when picking them up. When out and about, a baby carrier is a great idea. Newborns love being close to their parents, and don't forget, the more you hold them, the stronger your bond will become.



Crying - The only way a newborn baby can communicate is through crying, so brace yourself, because you will hear it often. If a baby is hungry, wet, cold, tired or sick, they will cry. Even completely healthy newborn babies cry between one and three hours a day.

You will soon start to notice patterns in your newborn's crying, and by establishing a routine, you will begin to anticipate their needs.



Washing - You won't need to fully bathe your baby for the first few days. Rather, you should "top and tail", which means washing your baby's face, neck, hands and bottom carefully instead. You should choose a time when your little one is content and make sure the room is warm. You'll need a bowl of warm water, a towel, cotton wool, a fresh nappy and clean clothes.



Sleeping - Newborn babies usually only sleep for two to three hours at a time, day or night. As they have very small stomachs they will also need to be fed little and often, which includes throughout the night. As your baby gets older, they will gradually begin to need fewer night feeds and will begin to sleep for longer periods of time.



Embracing new changes

Your skills are set to improve as you get used to all the extra demands a baby will bring. You will be surprised by your strength each day, and will never fail to amaze your family, even if you don't notice how amazing you have become.



A great way to cope with the new demands you will be facing is to speak to other mothers in the same position as you. Groups, clubs and activities, like Puddle Ducks, can help you connect with mothers who may be facing the same challenges as you. Then you can swap tips and disaster stories!

Remembering to look after yourself

From looking after your new baby to balancing your work and making the effort to keep an active social life, there is no doubt that the next year of your life is going to be demanding. Even if you feel like you have no time at all, you must remember how important it is to continue to look after yourself.

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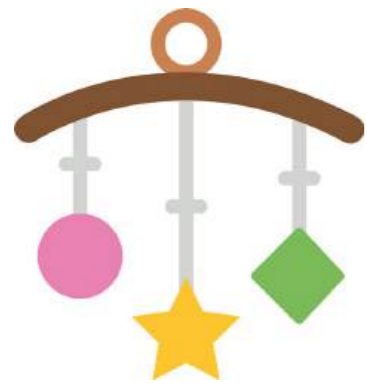
A discovery made by a team at an Israeli university, found that when a mum and newborn looked each other in the eye, their heart rates co-ordinated in seconds.

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Rest

Babies sleep patterns are different than adults and a typical newborn will wake every 2 to 3 hours to be fed, changed or comforted. This can lead to new parents feeling overwhelmed with exhaustion.

You may not get a full night's sleep for a while yet but there are ways you can try to get on top of your tiredness.

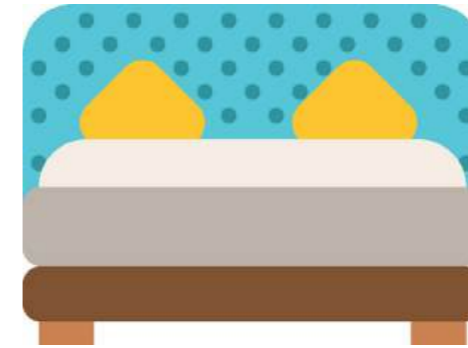


When your baby sleeps, grab a quick nap. This can take a lot of discipline as the laundry will be piling up and the washing up will be staring at you but even if you just grab a few minutes, it all adds up.

Move your baby's bed next to yours at night so you save time if you have to wake up to feed them. Co-sleeper cots are a great idea and you can find some brilliant second hand deals.



After the first few weeks, you could think about introducing a bottle to breastfed babies for night-time feeding. This way, someone else can feed the baby at night so you can have a longer period of uninterrupted sleep.



When your friends and family visit, never feel obliged to entertain. Feel free to excuse yourself for a nap, you'll be surprised how understanding people can be. If they can bring a meal for the freezer to take the pressure off you, even better!

Maintaining a healthy diet for recovery

- Childbirth can have a huge effect on a woman's body and the right type of diet is essential for healing and recovery.
- Weight gain during pregnancy is actually essential as it helps build stores for recovery and breastfeeding. The first few months after childbirth, you shouldn't worry about shifting your baby weight, but instead concentrate on eating a healthy and balanced diet.
- The general advice is that breastfeeding mothers should eat when they are hungry but some mothers are often busy and tend to forget to eat full meals in the first few weeks. Try to plan healthy and simple meals that include starchy whole grain foods like brown bread and rice, plenty of fruit and vegetables, protein and low fat dairy products.
- It's important to keep your iron levels up too. Low iron levels can make you feel even more tired so eat iron rich foods like spinach, red meat, iron-fortified cereals and seafood to help boost your levels.

Don't forget to treat yourself though! Those foods that were off limits when you were pregnant are back on the menu!

Keeping active

No matter how active you were before pregnancy, you may now notice that you have less desire to keep active due to your tiredness.

The types of exercises you do may also change, as you'll have to concentrate on posture, the repair and restoration of your pelvic floor and other, gentle exercises that help with general recovery.

A great way to start exercising again is to take your baby with you! A couple of months after you have given birth, joint exercise can really help with your bonding and wellbeing. This can be anything from a stroll around the park to mother and baby swimming lessons.



Work life balance

After maternity leave is over, many women choose to or have to go back to work full time. Juggling a job and a family may feel like you are being pulled in two different directions; getting that balance right is key but can be tricky.

Becoming a full time (or part-time) working mother can sometimes feel overwhelming, but there are ways you can make sure both your career and your family flourish.

1. Concentrate on the positives

If you ever find yourself feeling guilty or remorseful when leaving your baby to go to work (and almost all working mothers go through this), you must think about how your job is benefiting your family. Through your job, you may be able to give your child better prospects when it comes to education, holidays, or extra activities such as clubs and sports.

2. Remember how it will benefit them

Research has shown that in 24 countries across the world, women whose mothers worked outside the home are more likely to have a job themselves, hold supervisory positions in these jobs and earn higher wages than women whose mothers stayed at home full time.



As well as this, men raised by working mothers are more likely to contribute to household tasks and spend more time caring for their family members. So, always remember when you are at work and feel like you're missing out, being a working mum is going to help the whole family in the long run.

3. Get organised

Avoid making mornings the mad rush they can be by getting organised the night before. Pack everyone's lunches, lay out clothes, and have everyone take a bath or shower in the evening. It's also worth deciding what to have for breakfast and packing bags and placing them by the door so you can pick them up before you leave.

Knowing that all the mundane tasks are done will give you more time to spend eating and enjoying breakfast together with your child. It will also make everything feel that little bit calmer before you head into work. Making your morning ritual about quality time and calmness is important as it will give you the headspace required to be prepared, focused and fully productive in work.

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A survey by Nature's Purest showed that new mums actually make an average of nine new friends in the first year after their babies are born.

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4. Do the banking and food shopping online

Instead of spending your Friday nights or Saturday mornings doing your big weekly shop, put some time aside when the kids have gone to bed one evening and order your big weekly shop to be delivered for Friday evening. You'll then start the weekend with a fridge full of food; leaving you free to spend more quality time with your child on your well earned days off.

The same can be said for online banking - sort out your standing orders and direct debits online on your lunch break so you won't have to waste the time you have with your kids doing admin. You'll be surprised at just how precious your free time will become; you'll find that little tricks you learn to extend your family time will become invaluable!

5. Draw a clear line between work time and family time

When you're at work make sure your head is in the game and when you are at home make sure you're being a parent. This can be one of the hardest things to manage when it comes to a work/life balance, but is certainly one of the most important.

Having two different phones, a work and a home one can help with this balance.



You will also have to be strict with yourself and try to keep overlap to a minimum, especially at weekends and holidays. Switch off and enjoy spending time with your family, it can often fly by too quickly.

Balancing work and home life can sometimes feel like a mammoth task, so you must ensure that you put time aside to clear your head of work and bond with your baby. You can make the most of your downtime and help with your baby's development by joining classes such as Puddle Ducks, where you can relax, bond, and socialise all at the same time.

Maintaining your social life



When you have a baby you have to accept that your social life will change but this doesn't mean it has to change for the worse. The old life you're used to might be slightly less attainable (or possibly even desirable) now but that doesn't mean your social life will disappear, it will just evolve into something brand new and it is up to you what you make of it.



There will be 7,300 nappy changes by baby's 2nd birthday



Not every new mum is the same and what works for some might not for others. Many may be happy with the balance they have whilst others might feel somewhat lonely in the first few weeks. The whole spectrum of feelings that come along with your first child are entirely normal for new mothers; the trick is to find out what balance is right for you.

Help is available

If you ever feel like you are on your own, keep in mind that there is always a support system available for you and your baby. Keeping in regular contact with people and opening up if you need a helping hand will ensure that you feel supported.

Many new mums are happy to get as much alone time with their baby as possible and others thrive off company during the first few months, so make sure you figure out what's best for you.

New mums

Making friends with fellow new mums is a great way to socialise, swap tips and find reassurance that you are doing a good job. Joining networking groups for new mothers is a great way of meeting new people. Activities like Puddle Ducks are full of mothers looking to socialise and meet people in a similar situation to themselves. You can even start that process early by joining antenatal groups (such as NCT or Puddle Ducks Aquanatal classes) and meeting other mums-to-be.

Don't neglect yourself

Even the most dedicated and responsible parents need some time on their own to rejuvenate. If there is an activity you miss that you used to love, from getting your hair done, to going on a hike, to simply finishing a good book, take some time out to do just that. Ask a friend or family member to look after your baby and take some guilt-free time for yourself.

Enjoy it



The first year of your baby's life will fly by so quickly, it's worth taking a step back to enjoy your time together. You will come across challenges, of course, but help will always be available when you need it, from friends, family, other new mums and your Health Visitor.



Your life will have changed, but this new chapter brings love, laughs, challenges and a whole range of unexpected surprises. You will feel a bond you never will have felt before, and there will be so much love from and for your little one you won't know what to do with it or how you coped without it.



Human babies are the only primates who smile at their parents!



How Puddle Ducks can help new mums

As this guide has shown, becoming a new parent is a testing time. Joining Puddle Ducks will not only be good exercise and development for your child but it also has additional benefits for new mothers.

The benefits new mums and their babies can find from swimming include:

- Gentle and manageable exercise for you and your baby.
- A great place to meet other new mums.
- The chance to relax and switch off from work.
- Quality bonding time for you and your child.
- In water, babies can move freely and develop actions they wouldn't otherwise be able to in their first year of life. This gives them the opportunity to develop crucial higher brain functions, core muscle development and co-ordination earlier.
- Swimming with your baby will ensure they develop a healthy love of water and will not be scared to begin swimming properly in the future.

Puddle Ducks teach independent swimming from birth in a nurturing environment with individually tailored activities. Swimming taught by experts...that's the Puddle Ducks' difference.



Want more info on mother and baby classes in your area?

Click here to contact us today!

