

The first few weeks at home with a new baby

The first few weeks with a new baby can be incredibly challenging. Many mothers say they wish they had a better idea about what to expect. The following list includes tips and comments from mothers about what they wish they knew about life with a new baby.

1. Sleep when your baby sleeps

Newborn babies don't sleep for long periods and will wake frequently to be fed. Every baby is different however most babies sleep between one and four hours at a time. Therefore you're unlikely to get a full-night's sleep for some months. If you sleep when your baby sleeps, the hours will add up. Trying to cook, clean or keep up to date with your 'to do list' while your baby is sleeping will leave you feeling exhausted. Turning off your phone (or taking your phone off the hook) can also help.

"Newborn babies need lots and lots of sleep. Keeping them up more during the day doesn't make them sleep any better at night, it just makes you frazzled."

"At three in the morning, remember that they aren't babies forever, and eventually, you will get some sleep."

2. Ask for or accept help from family and friends

Finding the time cook, clean, do the groceries, and so on, can be very difficult when you have a new baby. If you have family or friends who offer to help, take advantage of this. If not, don't be afraid to ask them to give you a hand. You could ask them to put on a load of washing, bring you a meal, vacuum the house, pick up a few groceries or run an errand.

3. Limit visitors in the first few weeks and send them home if you're tired

In the first few weeks after birth new parents can feel pressured to accept endless visits from family members and friends who want to see the new baby. This can be very draining and leave you feeling exhausted. Try to limit the number of visitors you see.

You are the best judge of how many visitors is too many. Ask your partner to help you limit visitors or blame your care provider for telling you to rest and not entertain!

4. Look after yourself

It is common for women to experience the 'baby blues' in the first few days after having a baby (e.g. feeling teary, irritated or overwhelmed). Some women wonder why they feel teary, overwhelmed or irritated. Others feel guilty or worried that they will not enjoy motherhood. These feelings are normal and should pass. It may help to talk to someone you trust about how you're feeling.

If you feel that you're not coping or your 'baby blues' last for more than a few days, you may need to seek help. Your GP, child health nurse or midwife are a good first contact or you can contact beyondblue (1300 22 4636, www.beyondblue.org.au), Lifeline (13 11 14, www.lifeline.org.au), PANDA (1300 726 306, www.panda.org.au), or Queensland Health on 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84).

"It's normal to feel hormonal and overwhelmed in the days and weeks after giving birth. Although I was warned about the baby blues nothing could have prepared me for how much I cried. It was all down to a mixture of hormones, exhaustion, and recovering from the birth. I can laugh now about some of the stupid things I cried about, but at the time I felt like I was falling apart."



5. Breastfeeding can be difficult

Breastfeeding is difficult for many women. It can be helpful to talk to other new mums about how you're going with breastfeeding. Help is available through the Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) who provides a breastfeeding helpline (1800 686 268) run by trained volunteer counsellors. Midwives, child health nurses and lactations consultants (breastfeeding experts) can also provide breastfeeding support through maternity hospitals or community based child and family health centres. Private lactation consultants and some private midwives also offer breastfeeding support. Medicare rebates are available from some private midwives.

"I wish I'd known how difficult breastfeeding can be ... I had no idea! I thought it would just come naturally but it turns out that babies have to learn as much as we do."

"Breastfeeding can take time, sometimes months, to learn and practise, but it does get better..."

6. Getting out of the house

Getting out of the house can be a nice change of scenery however some women feel pressure to get out of the house soon after birth. Interestingly in many traditional societies women stay at home for up to four or five weeks to rest and get to know their baby. This may not be possible or even desirable but try not to feel pressured to get out of the house too soon after birth - take your time and trust your own judgement.

7. Finding the time to have a shower

It can be hard to find the time to have a shower when you have a new baby. While some women love not having to get out of their pyjamas all day, others feel much better after having a shower. It can be helpful to try and shower when your baby is asleep, however if you find this difficult you can try showering with your baby in a car seat or bouncer inside the bathroom with the door open to let out steam.

8. Knowing what's normal

It can be hard to know, as a first time mother, whether your baby's behaviour is normal (e.g. sleeping, feeding, weeing, pooing). While it can be useful to compare your baby's behaviour to other babies of a similar age, remember that all babies are different. The most important thing you can do for yourself and your baby is to trust your instinct. You are the best person to know what your baby needs. If you are worried, ask other mothers or your care provider but try to trust your own judgement.

"I wish I'd known that I would be fine, and I would grow in confidence as a mother. That I really did know what was best for my baby..."

"Parenting is 90% confidence, 10% skill"

9. Interacting with your baby

Babies are born with the ability and desire to communicate. From the first weeks of life babies interact socially by using eye-contact, smiling, vocalising and imitating facial expressions. These social connections promote bonding and are important for your baby's social development. Try to find quiet time to have these connections when your baby is not hungry or tired. It will help you get to know your baby and be able to read their signs more effectively.

"I always thought babies only slept and ate for the first year or two of life. I didn't even think they could see properly. But from birth my baby knew my voice and would gaze deeply into my eyes... my husband even could get her to poke her tongue out!"

10. Advice from care providers

Mothers often say that they get conflicting information from different care providers. It can be helpful to choose one or two care providers that work for you and that you trust. This might be your GP, child health nurse, private midwife or pharmacy nurse, etc. Some mothers choose to listen to the advice that works and makes sense to them. The key is flexibility and knowing that often there is no 'one right way'.

11. Things may not always go to plan

Many women have plans about how they want motherhood to be. The first few weeks with a new baby, however, can be a lot more challenging than imagined. Try not to be too hard on yourself if things don't go exactly to plan.

"You will probably break all your pre-mummy vows about routines, sleep and feeding. Just to get some peace, or through necessity. Don't beat yourself up about it."

"You are allowed to have some time apart from your baby. It doesn't mean you're a failure."

For information on other post birth topics such as *Finding support with other new mums* and *Where can I go for care and support after birth?* visit www.qcmb.org.au/parents

Quotes have come from www.babycentre.co.uk/a1046160/what-i-wish-id-known-about-life-with-a-newborn, personal correspondence and QCMB Facebook posts