
Parenthood and your relationship

Summary

- The birth of your first child can significantly change your relationship.
 - Everyone's experience in the early months after the birth of their child is different.
 - Your relationship can be a great source of strength and support.
 - There are ways to look after and strengthen your relationship with your partner
-

Having your first child and becoming a parent is a major event for most people, and it affects lives and relationships. Couples have to cope with the demands of pregnancy, childbirth and parenting, as well as dealing with their changing relationship.

Other significant relationships also change. For example, grandparents often become more involved in day-to-day life. This can bring up issues about your own childhood or your relationship with your parents. Social interactions with friends change due to the demands of caring for your new baby, and your new priorities. Open communication can help you to address and come to terms these feelings.

Many couples adjusting to parenthood find their relationship is enriched and is a great source of strength and support.

Pregnancy and your relationship

It is important to share the pregnancy as a couple and talk to each other about your feelings. There are issues for both partners during pregnancy, including:

- Each person's reaction to the pregnancy
- Coping with the emotional and sexual changes that accompany pregnancy and child rearing
- Concerns about the future.

Becoming a parent

The birth of your child also changes your family situation. Sharing the experience of birth is important to many couples and many fathers are present at their child's birth.

All sorts of thoughts and feelings will arise for both the mother and father during and immediately after their child's birth. It is important to have time to talk about this, because it is part of forming the early family bonds.

Parenthood, intimacy and your relationship

Everyone's experience in the early months after the birth of their child is different. For some couples, the transition to parenthood is easy and it strengthens their relationship. For others, it can be a time of tiredness and stress that causes them to become distant and withdrawn.

Becoming parents also means there is less time for each other. While some people are happy to make this change, some may feel left out or unloved. It's important to acknowledge and communicate feelings of grief and sadness about losing your exclusive couple relationship. Make time to sit down and talk with your partner.

Many couples experience uncertainty in their sexual relationship after the birth of a child. Some find that the demands of parenting affect their sexual needs and their lovemaking. It is important for couples to be honest and open about this to avoid pain and misunderstanding.

Resumption of sexual activity after having your baby is a decision for both of you to make. Once your bleeding has stopped and you feel comfortable, talk to each other about when to resume having sex.

Remember that it is possible to become pregnant while you are breastfeeding, and before the return of your first period. Breastfeeding delays the return of your period, but you will ovulate before your period returns. If you have sex at this time you may become pregnant.

Some issues that may affect your decision to resume sexual intercourse include:

- Tiredness
- Feeling unhappy with your body after pregnancy and birth
- Lack of libido (sex drive)
- Pain during intercourse
- Having had an episiotomy or tear
- Breastfeeding
- Problems with your pelvic floor.

Discuss any health problems that continue beyond six weeks after the birth of your child with your doctor or midwife. Contact your doctor, midwife, maternal and child health nurse or family planning clinic for more information.

You may also find it helpful to talk to a counsellor if you are having difficulty resuming your sex life and it is affecting your relationship with your partner.

Contraception for new parents

After you have had a baby, there are a number of options available for contraception. These include:

- **Mini pill** (for breastfeeding mothers) – this method is 96 to 99 per cent effective when taken carefully, and it has little or no effect on breastmilk and does not harm the baby.
- **Combined pill** (for non-breastfeeding mothers) – this method is 98 to 99 per cent effective when taken according to the instructions. Evidence suggests that the combined contraceptive pill (containing oestrogen and progestogen) is unsuitable for breastfeeding mothers.
- **Condoms** – this method is 95 to 97 per cent effective at preventing pregnancy when used correctly every time.
- **Diaphragm** – this method is 85 to 94 per cent effective.
- **Intrauterine device** – this method is 99 per cent effective.
- **Sterilisation** – this operation is very effective, with a failure rate of 0.2 per cent.
- **Natural family planning** – this method can vary from 75 to 99 per cent effective.
- **Implanon (hormone implant)** – Discuss this option with your doctor or family planning clinic.

Strengthening your relationship with your partner

If you are expecting your first child or are a new parent, there are some steps that may help you strengthen your relationship with your partner.

- **Share your experiences** – talk about the joys and achievements, as well as the doubts and frustrations. Let your partner know how you feel.
- **Take control of your relationship** – be clear about how you want your relationship to be and how you would like your new family to be. Talk about family traditions and values that are important to you.
- **Give yourself time** – spend time alone together as a couple, regularly and without your child. This will give you a chance to get close and regain some energy.
- **Work as a team** – try to ensure you both get enough sleep, share housework and parenting tasks, and be kind to each other. Remember to give praise and encouragement and to share your successes together.

Seeking help for your relationship

If you find that there are difficulties in your relationship after you become parents, consider seeking the help of a

betterhealth.vic.gov.au

counsellor. This will give you the chance to talk to someone who understands some of the changes you are going through and can help you and your partner to feel closer and communicate more clearly about your feelings and expectations.

Where to get help

- Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA) National Register (Family and Relationship Therapy) Tel. (03) 9486 3077
- Your doctor
- Maternal and child health nurse
- Relationships Australia services include counselling, mediation, dispute resolution, relationship and parenting skills education, community support, employee assistance programs and professional training. Services and programs are available nationally. Tel. 1300 364 277 www.relationships.org.au
- Family Relationship Advice Line Tel. 1800 050 321
- Australian Association of Relationship Counsellors Tel. 1800 806 054

Things to remember

- The birth of your first child can significantly change your relationship.
- Everyone's experience in the early months after the birth of their child is different.
- Your relationship can be a great source of strength and support.
- There are ways to look after and strengthen your relationship with your partner.

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

Relationships Australia Victoria

Content on this website is provided for information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not in any way endorse or support such therapy, service, product or treatment and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. The information and materials contained on this website are not intended to constitute a comprehensive guide concerning all aspects of the therapy, product or treatment described on the website. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions and to ascertain whether the particular therapy, service, product or treatment described on the website is suitable in their circumstances. The State of Victoria and the Department of Health & Human Services shall not bear any liability for reliance by any user on the materials contained on this website.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Copyright © 1999/2018 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.