



Lifestyles, relationships and sex eBook

HUGGIES

When you welcome your new addition to the family, it will inevitably have an effect on virtually every aspect of your life. It is often hard to figure out how to strike a balance between meeting the new demands in your life, without sacrificing other aspects of your old life. The reality is, sometimes you won't. And that is absolutely ok.

This eBook looks at everything from keeping the spark in your relationship, what's normal when it comes to [sex after your bub](#) arrives, through to practical ways to manage stress and answering your questions about the changes to your body after baby.

The good news is you don't have to handle all of it alone and there is plenty of support available for new mums and partners when the going gets tough. We've included a range of useful support services you may find helpful.



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Coping with life after bub

Welcome to the world of [motherhood](#)! From the moment you got the positive result on the pregnancy stick your world changed forever. However once your baby arrived it probably only just started to sink in how much your world has altered.

So how do you cope with the new demands of motherhood and daily life? The key is accepting that you will have good days and bad days. Sometimes you'll have a run of both. And that is all perfectly normal. But as you figure out the juggle here are some useful tips to help you cope that little bit better:

- 1. Double it:** women are marvelous at doing two things at once. So do the ironing while watching your favourite tv programme or feed bub and check your emails. Often it is hard to avoid the hamster in the wheel feeling, especially in the early days, but this will certainly help you be more productive.
- 2. Write it down:** have notepads and pens all round the house. Fatigue makes it hard to keep track of everything you need to do. If you remember you're running low on something in the fridge you can jot it down while you're feeding bub. Or if you're on the phone with a friend and remember an upcoming birthday, you can make a quick note of it. By jotting things down when you remember them you'll be able to keep on top of the details.
- 3. Leave home:** regardless of how tired you are, it is vital you leave the house each day. Even if it is only a quick walk to the end of the street make sure you go outside, [get some fresh air](#) and remind yourself there is a world outside the new one you are in.
- 4. Chill:** your home does not need to look like something out of a house and garden magazine. Your baby won't care about that at all. Do what you can, but resting is your priority in the early days. A handy hint is to invest in lots of nice boxes or containers to store things in. It's a great way to stash away magazines, toys or general clutter until you're able to sort through it all properly.
- 5. Just ask:** there are no medals for motherhood. So don't be afraid to accept offers of help or ask for it if you need it. This is a great way to help involve your partner in the early days. He can help with [cuddling an unsettled bub](#) while you get a nap, or together you can prepare an evening meal and catch up on your respective days.

Keeping the spark in your relationship

After a long day, and possibly an even longer night it can seem almost impossible to focus on keeping the spark in your relationship. The thing is, spark doesn't mean sex. It means keeping the communication lines open with your partner and ensuring you both know and understand where the other person is at.

As bub grows and starts to sleep for longer stretches you will both feel better equipped to do that. Being patient and tolerant is crucial in those early days.

6 spark tips:

1. Eat dinner together after bub has gone to bed for the night. Try not to do this in front of the television!
2. Write a post-it note and leave it in his bag thanking him for something helpful he has done recently.
3. Notice and compliment him on the little things like a new haircut.
4. Hugs, hand holding and cuddling up on the couch are great ways to establish physical contact for you both.
5. Establish a 'date night' once bub is a couple of months old. Book a sitter and head out for the evening together.
6. Make time to look after yourself. It's amazing how a shampoo, blow-dry and a light application of make-up can go a long way to making you feel more attractive!



Sexual health

Women are usually given the clearance to resume normal sexual relations after the six-week check up. For some women this is great news. For others this may be another task to be added to a seemingly endless 'to do' list.

Reasons why sex may not be on the list:

- A [painful or traumatic birth](#) may make some women feel frightened about the prospect of having sex. If this is the case, you should talk to your GP to ensure that physically it won't be painful for you. If it is an [emotional thing](#), then communicate your fears with your partner and seek counseling if needed.
- You may find that because of the birth you are suffering from vaginal dryness or possibly a [period of bleeding](#) that extends beyond six weeks. In either case, talk to your GP who may recommend appropriate treatments to help even out your hormones.
- No libido. It's hardly surprising that for many women they simply don't feel like having sex even a few months after having a baby. A combination of fatigue, hormonal changes and [breastfeeding](#) may make you feel as if you simply don't have the energy to brush your teeth properly, let alone have sex.
- For many women the change in body image after having a baby is the biggest reason why they don't feel like having sex. (See our section on Body Image for practical advice on coping with this.)
- Your bub is in the room. While it is likely your bub will sleep through or at least until the next feed, some parents can feel a little uncomfortable at the thought of a third party snoring through their nocturnal activities. It's worth thinking about having sex elsewhere if that's the case or gently relocating bub while you're busy.



Sexual health

So how do you resume having sex again if you're feeling tired, libido-less or scared?

- Talk with your partner first about your fears and make sure they understand how you feel. If fatigue is at the top of your reasons list, get their help with some of the tasks round the house. Not only will it help you out, it may mean you have more time and energy for sex.
- Plan it round your baby's schedule. If bub takes an afternoon nap on weekends, this is often a good time for all parties concerned. Think about what works best for you and your family dynamic.
- Don't necessarily start out with sex on the agenda. Start with the basics like holding hands and cuddling.
- When you decide you're ready for sex make sure you take it slow and have lubricant on hand.
- Be prepared to experiment with different positions to ease pressure on your [perineum](#), especially in the early days.
- Don't expect it to be like it was before you had a baby. It will take time for both of you to adjust to the massive lifestyle change you've undergone. As time passes you will both find the rhythm and flow you enjoyed previously.



Body image

The old adage is “nine months on and nine months off.” This is great in theory, but the reality is we are bombarded by magazine covers of celebrities sharing how they got their bodies back in six weeks.

This is not helpful to new mums for many reasons. Firstly these celebrities had access to round-the-clock support that the vast majority of us just don't have. Secondly it simply isn't realistic for the vast majority of women to regain their “old body” after having a baby.

What is vital for all women in terms of their body image is to look after their body. This self-care doesn't mean obsessing about [weight](#), measurements or extreme diets. What DOES mean is looking after yourself properly by getting sleep when you can, eating properly and taking [regular exercise](#) once you've been cleared by your doctor to do so.

Our bodies need sleep, and while during those early days it may seem as if you will never sleep again, you will. In the meantime, try to rest when the baby does.

Mayo Clinic certified nurse-midwife Mary M. Murry suggests that: “It might seem counterintuitive, but to take off those excess kilos it's important to eat regular meals after the baby is born. Even though you might be busier - and more tired - than you bargained for, be careful to eat healthy meals and snacks. It's also important to make conscious choices about what - and how much - you eat. Be aware of what you're eating and really think about it before you pop it in your mouth.”

When it comes to exercise, start slowly. It might be a walk to the shops with the pram to get some basics and building up from there. You might invest in some exercise DVD's and work out while bub is sleeping.

Spend some time on your appearance. [Ida Niedrich](#), a beauty industry expert with over 20 years experience, says for many new mums the first issue is finding the energy and motivation to take the time to [put some make-up on](#). Her advice is simple and honest: “Make up is often about confidence, that's why so many people use it. At a time when your energies are elsewhere, this is an easy investment in yourself which will go a long way to making you feel better about yourself.”



Stress management

It is important to know that stress and feeling stressed are completely normal experiences. Stress is actually a great motivator for helping us to get things done. However being too stressed can have the opposite, almost paralysing effect. This can have a very negative effect on your ability to cope with your relationship, with your baby and juggling the demands of day-to-day life.

The thing is, it is perfectly normal to feel stressed and overwhelmed when you become a mother. Babies are demanding little creatures and when you add in the need to cope with them as well as the major lifestyle changes you have undergone as well as your relationship, household and work demands, it is no wonder people feel overwhelmed.

Acknowledging you feel stressed is often hard to do. Sometimes you don't even know that is how you are feeling. Once you are aware of the signs however you can then take some simple steps towards combating it and coping with it.

Some key signs of stress:

- Racing heart or dry mouth
- Feeling you aren't balancing everything you have to do
- Continually feeling unwell or tired
- Reluctant to get out of bed every day
- Constantly finding things to worry about
- Over-eating or drinking excessively

The good thing is women are genetically programmed to deal with stress better as we are better at communicating with others. However, new motherhood often makes it hard for us to do this. In the early weeks, it is difficult, if not impossible to have any extended 'alone time.' Rather than building up resentment, work with your nearest and dearest so they can keep an eye on your little one while you rest. Skip the housework, just take time to read a book or take a short walk. Family doctor of 25 years Dr Duncan Jefferson advises: "Ask for help when you need it and never worry about asking for help - just ask!"



Another simple, yet highly effective strategy to combating stress is positive self-talk. It may feel awkward or uncomfortable initially, but it is important to work from within when managing stress. When you have a negative thought, simply challenge it with a positive one. If you are at home on your own, say it aloud. For instance, if your little one won't settle off to sleep, rather than thinking you're not coping or feeling like a failure, just think: "How can I change this situation?" It might be that you need to check their nappy or give them an extra cuddle to settle them.

When you and your partner argue, instead of getting into a list of his shortcomings or obsessing over why it is your fault, take a deep breath and walk away. Remind yourself to stay calm and think of the positive things you have achieved that day. Think about the good things your partner has done recently. It is important to focus on positive aspects rather than getting caught up in a cycle of negativity.

Managing stress effectively comes from sharing your feelings with others and also combating negative feelings internally. By dealing with stress on both fronts, it will help to reduce its impact on your overall wellbeing.



Women's health - frequently asked questions

Ever since my baby arrived I seem to leak urine when I lift things or laugh.

This is usually known as stress incontinence. It's a consequence of labour and delivery where the muscles that support your bladder and urethra have been weakened and stretched. This causes the urine to leak.

To combat it, do your Kegals (also known as your [pelvic floor exercises](#)) regularly. To do so, simply squeeze on the muscles that control your urine flow.

Hold for up to ten seconds and repeat in sets of 10 four or five times a day. You can do Kegals absolutely anywhere, and in order to strengthen your bladder you need to.

I'm breastfeeding and my period started today. Is this normal?

This varies from mother to mother. Some breastfeeding mums get their periods back as early as 11 or 12 weeks after giving birth. For other mums, it may be over a year before their periods return. It also depends on the level of the hormone progesterone in your body. Lower levels of progesterone mean you're likely to get your periods back earlier than mums with higher levels.

I'm so tired and feel like crying all the time. Should I be feeling like this?

After you have a baby there are 3 commonly recognised mood disorders:

1. 'Baby blues' - this affects 80% of new mothers and usually strikes between the third and tenth day after birth. Typical symptoms are tearfulness, anxiety, mood fluctuations and irritability. These tend to pass very quickly.
2. Postnatal psychosis is at the opposite end of the mood disorder spectrum. This affects 1 in 500 mothers, usually in the first 3-4 weeks after delivery. This is a serious condition. The mother herself might be unaware she is ill, because her grasp on reality is distorted. Key symptoms are marked elation or depression, disturbance in thought processes, weird thoughts, insomnia and unsuitable responses to the baby. There is risk to the life of both mother and baby if the problem is not recognised and treated. Postnatal psychosis requires a hospital stay. Women suffering from postnatal psychosis fully recover as long as they receive the appropriate treatment.

3. [Postnatal depression](#) (PND) lies in the middle of the spectrum and more than 15% of women and 10% of men develop PND. Many women don't know that PND can occur unexpectedly after delivery and will often blame themselves, their partners or their baby for the way they feel.

Symptoms include:

- Feeling exhausted, every day, even after a long sleep.
- Being unable to sleep, no matter how tired and exhausted you are.
- You find it hard to concentrate on something, or organise yourself or other simple tasks.
- You find yourself feeling tearful and sometimes weeping, and you aren't sure why.
- You lose track of time, and find hours go by and you can't be sure what you've been doing.

With the right help PND is manageable. Make sure you talk to your baby health centre. They are trained to offer support to women with postnatal depression, and to advise when further help from your doctor or elsewhere would be useful. They may be able to put you in touch with other mums or other support services in your local community.

Your doctor may prescribe anti-depressants, or refer you to other forms of help. Talk to your partner and family. You deserve support. 'Talking therapy' is regarded as the most effective in the treatment of PND and your GP can provide you with a referral for this.



Men's FAQ

I love our new baby, but my partner won't let me help out with them at all. I feel very left out. What do I do?

This is a common mistake new mums often make. You need to talk with her about the fact that you want to be part of the parenthood journey. Explain that you can help with washing and changing the baby. Offer to cuddle bub while she naps or goes outside for some fresh air. Try not to hand them back to your partner when things get demanding. One-on-one time will help develop your relationship with your little one.

Encourage your partner to have an early night and bring bub in when they need feeds and take them back and settle them at the end of the feed. If bub is bottle-fed, do the feed and let her have a longer stretch of sleep.

I love my wife and we used to have a really active sex life. Now she doesn't seem interested at all. Why is this?

Fatigue is a libido killer and your partner is probably exhausted. She may also be concerned about getting pregnant again or she may be feeling unattractive because of the changes to her body shape. Your role is to be as supportive as possible. Talk about what contraceptive methods you plan on using. Help her out with the housework and show her that you find her attractive.

I don't know what I should do to help my partner out at home. Everything I do seems to be wrong.

Start with the practical things. Doing the food shop or ordering it online is a great help. Check with her on what is needed, make a comprehensive list and go and get it. If she is breastfeeding, make sure she has a water bottle at hand at all times to keep her hydrated. Stock up the nappy bag so that you can take an outing together. Be patient. The tiredness and sleep deprivation will pass.



Top date ideas on a budget

It's often inevitable that along with the arrival of a new baby there is also a big cut in the family budget for a while. At a time when you're often time, energy and cash-poor it is also important to spend some quality time together. Here are some great budget date suggestions!

1. Play board games and see who is the ultimate Monopoly board winner.
2. Try out a new restaurant and split a yummy dessert.
3. Pop the baby monitor on and head out to the back garden. Lay out a blanket with a home-cooked meal or order from your favourite take-away.
4. Rent a DVD, or get some tickets to see the latest Box Office Movie hit. Bring your own popcorn and snacks.
5. Go to the local fresh markets and buy a new fruit or product that you've never eaten before.
6. Check out your local community newspaper for free events they're running. You can often see an art exhibition or participate in a cooking class together for free!
7. Watch for local listings of food and wine tastings.
8. Research local tourist spots and go together to explore them.
9. Turn off the television and have a bubble bath. Together.
10. Pack up the picnic basket with crackers, cheese and some sandwiches with great fillings and head to a nearby park for a picnic.



Finding a babysitter

Finding a babysitter is important for you and your baby. It means you can have some valuable time with your partner, or time on your own. It's also good for bub's development to spend time being cared for occasionally by a non-parent.

So how do you find a good babysitter that you can trust with your precious baby?

1. Start the search close to home by enlisting family members if they are available. Grandparents, aunts and cousins are often excellent as sitters.
2. Talk to your health nurse. They often have great contacts or can recommend suitable candidates.
3. Hit up your friends. Now this can often be tough, if your friend has a sitter they may not necessarily want to 'share' them with you. However as long as you make it clear you only want to share, not poach them, it can be a good arrangement.
4. There are lots of screened babysitting services. These usually charge a joining fee in order to have access to their database.
5. Local university students. Uni students are often keen to find a job that fits in around their studies and this can be a great match.
6. Your local shops will usually have a noticeboard where you can place flyers for free. Pop one up specifying exactly what it is you will need.
7. Ask at your local library, pre-school and community centre. You will often find people advertising their services on the bulletin boards.



Make sure you interview your sitter thoroughly before using them to ensure you are both comfortable with each other.

You may find the checklist below helpful when it comes to providing them with information.

Before you leave on your night out, some useful information for your sitter might include:	
<i>Name and age of child</i>	
<i>I will be at</i>	
<i>You can contact me at</i>	
<i>The place I am at</i>	
<i>Bed time is</i>	
<i>Neighbour's number and name is</i>	
<i>Local GP's name and number</i>	
<i>Change of baby clothes are located</i>	
<i>Extra nappies are located</i>	
<i>Extra towels are located</i>	
<i>Extra bedding is located</i>	
<i>First aid kit is located</i>	
<i>Special instructions</i>	



Support checklist

There is a great deal of help available if you feel you need extra support or advice. If you wish to explore family or relationship counseling, talk to your GP about a referral to the service most relevant to your needs.

The list below explains what key services are available to you and what they offer.

Family counseling:

Family relationships advice line

1800 050 321

www.familyrelationships.gov.au

Provided by the Federal government, it is open from 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday. It provides referrals for counseling to improve relationships and the website has information and assistance on family relationships, resolving disputes and counseling.

Relationships Australia

1300 364 277

www.relationships.com.au

Go to the home page and click on “where we are” to find the services available in your area.

Perinatal Anxiety and depression helplines:

PANDA Post and Antenatal Depression Association Inc.

1300 726 306

www.panda.org.au

This provides peer counseling from trained volunteers who have usually experienced perinatal anxiety themselves.

Beyond Blue – the national depression initiative

1300 22 4636

www.beyondblue.org.au

This provides accurate information on depression as well as an information line for those experiencing it, plus referral advice for families and sufferers.

Pregnancy, Birth and Baby helplines:

Healthdirect Australia

1800 882 436

www.healthdirect.org.au/pbb

This line is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and provides information and referrals on everything from pregnancy care to the care of babies and parents.

Parentline

Offers counseling, referral and information from trained professional counseling on all aspects of parenting.

Parentline Queensland and NT

1300 301 300

Parentline Victoria

13 22 89

Parentline Helpline South Australia

1300 364 100

Parentline Helpline Western Australia

1800 654 432

Parentline ACT

02 6287 3833

Parentline Tasmania

1300 808 178





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