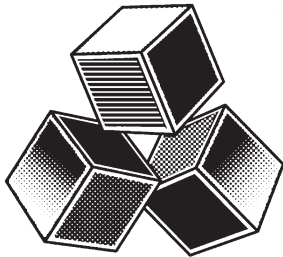


Becoming a Parent



PARENT EXPRESS

A Guide for You and Your Baby

Dear Parent-to-Be:

Welcome to Parent Express!

Parent Express is a series of guides that will help you discover how your baby grows and develops each month. It will take you through some of the ups and downs, the ins and outs of being a parent. *Parent Express* will discuss your feelings about being a new parent. It also will give practical advice and suggestions for you and your baby.

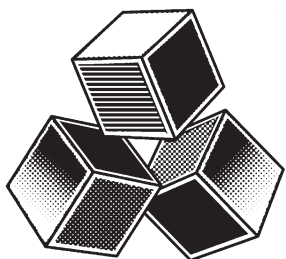
The first three issues—Becoming a Parent, Getting Ready, and Newborn Baby—highlight how to prepare for the big event and focus on the first few weeks of the newborn's life. The following issues cover each month of your baby's first three years.

This issue of *Parent Express* looks at some things to consider before your baby enters your life. Being a new parent can be an exciting time. It can be a little scary, too. It will change your life in many ways. The more you think about these changes beforehand, the more you will feel in charge of your own life.

This will be an important first year for you and your baby. *Parent Express* is glad to be part of it!

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It takes time to feel comfortable in your new role as a parent. After all, being a new parent is on-the-job training, and you should not expect that you will know how to handle everything overnight.

Fathers, Don't Feel Nervous or Left Out

Now all the attention seems to focus on the mother-to-be, and later it will center on the new baby. But this is a time when fathers are needed. Pregnant women may sometimes be uneasy about the ways their bodies have changed, especially during the last few months of pregnancy. They might be upset that they don't look like they used to, can't move around like they used to, and feel more tired and heavy than they used to. Talk with your partner. Tell her how you feel about her and about the new baby. Listen to how she is feeling. Sharing your feelings can bring you closer together and can help you feel part of things.

A Time of Change

Having a baby—especially your first—is a time of many changes. Most first-time parents receive little preparation for the big event and the many ways the new baby will have an impact on their lives.

If you will be raising your baby alone, going to school, or working, you will have added pressures on your time and energy. You need to figure out how to juggle your many responsibilities. The decisions and arrangements you make now will help ease the transition into parenthood after your baby is born. Check what resources are available for parents in your community. It is important to find as many supports as you can.

If you are a couple, expect some strains as you make the transition into parenthood. You may both have feelings you could not predict. For example, a new mother is usually very much occupied

with the baby and, as a result, the father may feel pushed aside or ignored. Make an agreement that you will talk with each other about your ups and downs and about your many new experiences and feelings.

Before the baby arrives is also a good time to discuss the sharing of responsibilities. Family roles are changing, and many couples now feel more flexible about who is going to do what in taking care of the baby and the household chores. Agree on your roles. The more you agree now, the fewer resentments and misunderstandings will pile up later.

Whether you are a couple or you are single and living alone or with your parents, your new baby will bring new experiences, pressures, and worries, as well as new joy and excitement. In those first hectic weeks, your life will seem to center around your small, helpless but demanding infant. There may be times when you will feel unsure, moody, or even overwhelmed. Most new parents feel this way at first.

It takes time to feel comfortable in your new role as a parent. After all, being a new parent is on-the-job training, and you should not expect that you will know how to handle everything overnight. Be patient with yourself. You are not alone in your feelings, and this time of adjustment will pass.

Build a Healthy Baby by Eating Well

Eating well is one way you can help prevent low birth weight and decrease the risk of problems during pregnancy, and it is never too soon to start. You could be pregnant several weeks before you know it, and during

those early weeks your baby's vital organs are beginning to develop.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Dietary Guidelines can help you build a better baby. Here is the daily food plan:

- ▶ 6 to 11 servings of grain products
- ▶ 3 to 5 servings of vegetables
- ▶ 2 to 4 servings of fruits
- ▶ 4 to 6 servings of low-fat milk products
- ▶ 2 to 3 servings of lean meat and protein
- ▶ Limited fatty foods and sweets

Pregnant women need 3 to 4 servings of protein, including lean meat and legumes, to support the nutrient needs of mother and baby.

Every day, drink at least six 8-ounce glasses of caffeine-free beverages, preferably water. Water helps digestion and the healthy function of organs. You may also find that drinking plenty of water helps keep you from becoming so tired. Nutritious liquids include low-fat milk and unsweetened fruit juices. You can also drink caffeine-free soft drinks.

Women of average weight before pregnancy should expect to gain 25 to 35 pounds while pregnant. Gaining much more weight or a lot less weight could be harmful to your health and that of your child. But don't be obsessed with the exact number of pounds. If you eat well and stay active, your weight will take care of itself.

Before you become pregnant, invest in a good multivitamin and take it daily. Women of childbearing age should also take 400 micrograms of folic acid every day, especially before and during pregnancy. Folic acid reduces the risk of certain birth

defects of the brain and spinal cord. Once you're pregnant, talk with your healthcare provider about prenatal vitamins. They're usually rich in iron and calcium, both of which are important for healthy babies. Fortified cereals are also a good source of folic acid, vitamins, and minerals.

Pregnancy is a good time to start paying more attention to food safety. Be sure any meat, fish, poultry, or eggs you eat are well-cooked. Toxoplasmosis, listeria, salmonella, and other food-borne illnesses can harm both you and your baby.

Build a Healthy Baby by Avoiding Harmful Substances

It is extremely important to stay completely away from smoking, alcohol, and drugs (unless prescribed by your healthcare provider) before you become pregnant and during your entire pregnancy. Everything you take into your body gets passed from you to your developing baby (fetus) through the umbilical cord. Harmful substances, even small amounts, can cause serious disabilities to the brain, central nervous system, and organs that may affect your child for life.

For example, smoking puts the fetus at risk for miscarriage, low birth weight, asthma, and high blood pressure, among other problems. Mothers-to-be who drink alcohol may cause problems in their babies, including low birth weight and shorter height, speech and language disorders, epilepsy and other types of seizures, deafness and other hearing disorders, mental retardation, cleft palate, sleep disorders, asthma, acting-out behavior, facial deformities, tremors, less resistance to disease, cerebral palsy, liver problems and possible

liver failure, heart defects and possible heart failure, mild to serious vision problems, difficulty in remembering, and autism.

Lifelong problems resulting from the above may include learning disabilities, dropping out of school early, juvenile delinquency, poverty, frequent unemployment, social problems, tendency toward violence, depression, alcoholism and other addictions, and mental and emotional illness, among other problems.

Isn't it great to realize that you can give your baby the wonderful gift of health and a head start on life by eating and drinking well? It is never too late to make positive changes for your own health and for the life growing inside you. If you have questions, ask your healthcare provider or staff at your county public health department for assistance.

Myths of Perfection

The Perfect Birth

There is no perfect birth. Each birth is different. The important thing is to bring your baby into the world in the healthiest way possible—for both the baby and you.

The Perfect Parent

There is no perfect parent. We all make mistakes. There will be times when you won't feel too sure about what you are doing. It takes time, practice, and experience to be a parent. The most important thing is to trust your own judgment and stick to it.

The Perfect Baby

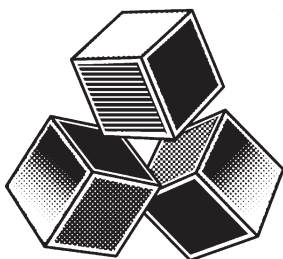
There is no perfect baby. Each baby is different, looks different, acts different, and grows up different from other babies. Your baby will grow at his own pace—don't be disappointed or try to rush him.

After the Baby, Rest

Having a baby is hard work. Arrange some time off just for yourself. You might be able to ask a relative or close friend to stay with you for a few hours or even for a few days when you come home with your new baby. This is especially important if you are a single parent or if you are expecting twins. In the case of twins, it will be doubly important for you to have some free time. Any help you can get to cope with the extra workload will make it easier for you. It will give you some time to relax, nap, take a walk, or talk with a friend.

Where to Get Help

- ▶ WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) is a program to provide nutrition education and supplemental food. It is available to low-income families and is for pregnant and breastfeeding women and their infants and children up to age 5. Contact your city or county health department for more information. Every county health department has a breastfeeding promotion coordinator.
- ▶ Public health departments can give you information on pregnancy, breastfeeding, development and care of babies and children, and answers to general questions.
- ▶ La Leche League is an international group of mothers who breastfeed. Check the white pages of your phone book to see if the organization has a chapter in your community. The league's international headquarters are at 957 Plum Grove Road, Schaumburg, IL 60173. Phone: (800) 525-3243 or (847) 519-7730. TTY for the Hearing Impaired: (847) 592-7570. Web: <http://www.llli.org/>.



Stay completely away from smoking, alcohol, and drugs (unless prescribed by your healthcare provider) before you become pregnant and during your entire pregnancy.

- ▶ National Organization of Mothers of Twins Clubs can give you the addresses of its local chapters so you can share information with other parents if you are expecting more than one baby. Write to: National Organization of Mothers of Twins Clubs Executive Office, 2000 Malloy Lane, Suite 130-600, Franklin, TN 37067-8231. Phone: (248) 231-4480. Web: <http://www.nomotc.org/>.
- ▶ The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission is a federal regulatory agency that protects the public against risk of injury and death from consumer products. It can give you information and booklets in English and Spanish on safety standards for cribs, toys, and other areas of child safety. Call toll free: (800) 638-2772. Hotline: TTY for the Hearing Impaired: (800) 638-8270. Address: 4330 East-West Highway, Bethesda, MD 20814-4408. Web: <http://www.cpsc.gov/>.
- ▶ Baby care and parenting classes may be offered in your community. Contact your local hospital or local chapter of the American Red Cross, or write: American Red Cross National Headquarters, 2025 E Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20006. Web: <http://www.redcross.org/>. You can call the organization's Kentucky headquarters in Louisville at (800) 272-3635.
- ▶ County Cooperative Extension offices can offer you information about local parenting education classes and can refer you to community family resource centers, which are located in many public elementary schools. They can also put you in contact with the nearest regional childcare resource and referral agency to assist with questions about high quality childcare.

Sources and Recommended Readings

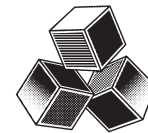
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Parent Express guides you through parenting of children through age 36 months. For other publications in the 27-part series, contact your county Cooperative Extension Service office.