



Supporting Mom^{through} Pregnancy, Delivery, and Postpartum

TIPS FOR DADS

David Miller, Azaliah Israel, and Nigel Vann (Fathers Incorporated)

Fatherhood is a fantastic journey, filled with the joys of watching your child grow and mature into adulthood. New dads are filled with anticipation for all the wonderful milestones to come, from hearing a tiny heartbeat on an ultrasound to teaching their child to ride a bike and their teenager how to drive. Supporting the mother of your child through pregnancy, delivery, and postpartum sets the foundation for a healthy relationship with her and the child. Traditionally, maternal healthcare has primarily focused on the mother and baby, but research increasingly emphasizes the vital role fathers play throughout this process. Research shows that fathers can provide significant emotional support and care for moms during these early developmental stages. Although this role as nurturer is often undervalued, it is a crucial one in the journey of fatherhood. When fathers are involved, they contribute not only to maternal well-being but also to healthier birth outcomes, successful child development outcomes, and overall family stability.

Did you Know?

- 84 percent of all maternal deaths are preventable.ⁱ
- Women from underrepresented communities and women lacking financial resources are at high risk for maternal health challenges.ⁱⁱ
- 63 percent of maternal deaths occur postpartum.ⁱⁱⁱ
- 50 percent of rural women lack access to perinatal services within a 30-mile drive from their home.^{iv}
- Mothers in rural communities face significant challenges, including poverty and limited access to quality health care, transportation, and housing.^v
- Although fathers are often overlooked in maternal health conversations, research indicates they are eager to be involved when their partners are pregnant.^{vi}
- Expectant fathers may experience what is referred to as sympathetic pregnancy (more formally known as [couvade syndrome](#)). This is when a father experiences changes that are similar to their partner's pregnancy symptoms, including weight gain, mood swings, anxiety, and irritability.
- Many expectant fathers experience a drop in their testosterone levels during their partner's pregnancy. As a result, they often become more empathetic to the mother and child, more likely to provide ongoing support for the mother, and more motivated to care for, and bond with, their child.^{vii}
- Just like mothers, fathers can also experience postpartum depression.^{viii}

What you CAN Do.

During pregnancy...

🎯 **Attend prenatal education classes with the mother.**

- New fathers will find these classes especially helpful because they cover every phase of pregnancy, the stages of labor, breastfeeding, and common interventions. You will learn about the importance of your role as a father in reducing mom's stress during her pregnancy and after the birth.
- Some mothers experience feeding challenges when they start breastfeeding so the more you learn about this, the more support you can provide.

🎯 **Learn about the stages of pregnancy.**

- This [Healthy Pregnancy](#) online site provides information on regular doctor visits, check-ups, prenatal tests and procedures, and other helpful resources.

🎯 **Promote healthy habits.**

- For example, encourage and share regular habits such as eating well, exercising, and avoiding smoking and alcohol. These habits not only contribute to the well-being of the mother but also help ensure the health of the baby. When possible, volunteer to exercise with your partner.

🎯 **Pay attention to your own mental health.**

- Early identification and appropriate professional guidance may improve your ability to adapt during and after the mother's pregnancy and also strengthen your emotional resilience.

🎯 **Talk with experienced dads.**

- Or get involved in a fatherhood program. Connecting with other dads and hearing about their experiences can help you understand what lies ahead and how best to support your partner.

LOOK FOR FREE OR REDUCED PRENATAL CARE



- Call 1-800-311-BABY (1-800-311-2229)
- For information in Spanish, call 1-800-504-7081
- Call or contact your local Health Department

What you CAN Do.

During delivery...

- ◎ **Understand the mother's birth plan before she goes into labor.**
 - Know her preferences for pain management and interventions. Whether she will be birthing at a hospital, a birthing center, or at home, be prepared to remind your healthcare provider of these preferences.
- ◎ **Be an active communicator with the birthing staff.**
 - Birthing is one of the most vulnerable experiences a mother can have. Serve as a liaison between the mother and staff, especially when the mother is in intense labor. Ask clarifying questions about procedures, risks, and alternatives. Advocate for the mother and speak up if something seems contrary to her wishes.
- ◎ **Offer comfort measures in the form of massages, breathing support, or words of affirmation and encouragement.**
 - Help create a calm environment by dimming the lights, playing music, and adjusting the temperature of the room.



What you CAN Do.

During postpartum recovery...

- ◎ **The arrival of the baby is exciting, but the journey isn't over.**
 - Listen to your partner, remain available, and pay attention to signs of complications like excessive bleeding, infection, or pain. Seek medical attention immediately if needed.
- ◎ **Learn about the importance of breastfeeding and support the mom's breastfeeding journey.**
 - Support mom during her breastfeeding journey by:
 - Washing bottles, milk pumps and other things necessary for feeding.
 - Offering her water and nutritious snacks.
 - Learning how to bottle feed with the pumped milk.
 - If your baby's mother will be bottle feeding, help her with nighttime feedings and allow her to rest.
- ◎ **Promote rest and recovery.**
 - Help mom with changing diapers, getting up to tend to the baby when they cry in the night, cooking, household chores, and caring for older children.
- ◎ **Build a support network with trusted family and friends.**
 - Be sure the mother feels comfortable accepting support, but if so it can be an invaluable way to help you stay on top of everything and ensure you both stay reasonably rested!
- ◎ **Set boundaries with visitors.**
 - Make sure they respect the mother's need for rest and privacy.
- ◎ **Understand and learn about infant development.**
 - Monitor your newborn's progress as they reach significant milestones and address concerns with your family's healthcare provider.
- ◎ **Learn about the possibility of postpartum depression.**
 - Know how to recognize signs of depression or anxiety and encourage your partner to seek help from their healthcare provider if needed.
- ◎ **Continue to check in with your own mental health.**
 - If you are feeling depressed, or others close to you remark on any changes, be sure to seek support and help. See [Taking Care of Your Mental Health](#) for helpful suggestions and resources.

LOOK FOR FREE RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES IN YOUR COMMUNITY

- [Healthy Start](#) programs provide prenatal support in many communities.
- [Home Visiting](#) programs are available around the country to provide in-home support, education, and resources for young families

Tips for DADS

in RURAL COMMUNITIES

When you live in a small, rural community, it can be harder to find maternal health services than in larger urban and suburban communities. This section provides information and tips to help rural dads find resources to provide extra support for the mother of their children.

◎ **Learn about the healthcare systems and resources available to support mothers and their babies in your community.**

- For example, there may be midwives or lactation consultants who can also offer advice about topics such as breastfeeding, pumping milk, and bottle feeding.
- Check out the [Lactation Network](#) and see if your insurance covers the cost of their assistance.

◎ **Look for support groups for rural mothers who are pregnant and/or parenting a newborn.**

- Ask around in your community, there may be an informal peer support group where moms are talking about pregnancy, postpartum experiences, and feeding their babies.

◎ **Look online for information and virtual support services.**

- We have included various resources throughout this document – check them out.

◎ **Identify transportation resources to help moms get to medical appointments.**

- Know how to recognize the signs of labor and have a plan for transportation if distance could be a factor in getting to the hospital on time.

◎ **Find out about doulas and midwives in your local community.**

- Doulas can be very helpful in rural communities where hospitals and other medical services may not be close by.

THE ROLE OF DOULAS AND MIDWIVES IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Doulas and midwives are trained to provide emotional support and education for pregnant mothers to help them through the birthing process and any postpartum depression. In rural communities, they can help mothers find affordable maternal health care resources and transportation to medical appointments.

Doulas are committed to a “whole family approach.” This means that fathers and older children are considered essential members of the birthing process and are encouraged to be involved. For instance, [Dads to Doulas](#) offers a free, six-week class for expectant fathers to receive doula-level training in order to assist their partners during pregnancy, delivery, and postpartum recovery.

For More Information and Support

NRFC RESOURCES

- NRFC Help Center: 1-877-4-DAD-411
- [Coparenting Tips for Dads](#) (2020)
- [Tip Card for New Dads](#) (2018)
- [Healthy Fathers, Healthy Families](#) (2015)

OTHER HELPFUL RESOURCES

- [Learn about breastfeeding and how you can support mom and baby](#) (U.S. Department of Agriculture, WIC Breastfeeding Support)
- [Learn about the signs of depression and anxiety around pregnancy](#) (National Child and Maternal Health Program)
- [The science of fatherhood: How your body and brain change when you become a dad](#) (BBC)
- [Couvade Syndrome: When partners develop pregnancy symptoms](#) (Cleveland Clinic)
- [Evidence Review: Perinatal Telehealth Services](#) (Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center)

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