

Dads' tips for dealing with relationship changes after baby

Relationship changes after baby: What men can expect

Most couples notice changes in their relationship after their baby arrives. At first, it's very exciting, and couples often feel closer.

However, you'll probably also find your lives suddenly structured around baby and her feeding, sleeping, settling, awake time and daily care.

In the early days at least, mums and dads often don't get a lot of sleep. With less sleep, you might be more irritable or more easily annoyed at other people. Your spouse and you might also be feeling helpless and frustrated if your baby is crying and nothing works to settle or calm her. This could also be the first time in your life when you've had less time for yourself.

These things can be a source of stress, frustration and conflict for both your spouse and you. You might end up arguing a lot, avoiding discussion or feeling bad, angry and 'disconnected'. These are all signs that your relationship is under pressure.

Baby's arrival can also change your sexual relationship with your spouse. Both you and your spouse might want to feel close again. However, having sex can sometimes be difficult because of tiredness, physical changes after childbirth, changes in the way your spouse feels sexually, or postnatal depression.

Tips for dealing with relationship changes after baby

When you have a secure relationship with your spouse and work well together, your baby feels safe and secure. This might even mean that your baby cries less, which makes your jobs easier! Here are some ideas for focusing on your relationship now that you're a dad:

- **Talk with your spouse and listen to her.** This is the best way to deal with these changes and look after your relationship.
- **Make time for each other.** In the early days, this might just be sitting together while you or your spouse feeds your baby.
- **Focus on the positive.** Think about much you're learning as new parents and how well you're caring for your new baby – these are big achievements. For example, if your spouse is learning to breastfeed, you could tell her you appreciate how hard she's trying.

Most couples do get their sexual relationship back on track. Here are a few things that might help this along:

- **Be patient.** It's important to reassure your spouse and try to understand her feelings. Often, couples are advised to wait until the six-week postnatal check-up before having sex again. Everyone is different, though, and some mothers might need to wait longer.

- **Find other ways to be intimate.** Try showing your love with extra kisses or cuddles, holding hands, giving massages or taking a bath together. Even a brief touch as you pass each other in the kitchen or get things from the car can remind you of your bond.
- **Get help if you need it.** These can be difficult issues to talk about. If you're finding it difficult, you might want to see a counsellor together.

A good relationship lets you parent as a team. This means working towards shared parenting values, making decisions together, solving problems constructively, and resolving conflicts calmly. Here's how:

- **Negotiate and share expectations.** This can be about everything from deciding on paid work arrangements to who cooks dinner.
- **Listen to your spouse's interests and concerns.** Mothers often say they value the chance to share what's happening – good and bad – with someone who really cares.
- **Be ready to step in when you're needed,** so your spouse can take a break.
- **Create a regular time to share ideas for dealing with problems** – ideally a time when you're both rested and unstressed.