



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime



Caring for Yourself & Your Newborn: A Guide for the Early Weeks

Bringing home a newborn is a **joyful and life-changing experience**. But it **can also feel overwhelming**. The early weeks are a time of big changes for both you and your baby. These tips can help you care for yourself and better understand your baby. Try to take it one day at a time.

Your feelings are normal

Caregivers experience a wide range of emotions after a baby is born. And all of them are valid.

- **Love and connection:** Some caregivers feel an instant bond. Others need more time. Both are completely normal.
- **Joy and delight:** Notice small moments. Your baby is amazing!
- **Overwhelm:** It takes a lot to learn about your baby. And it's very hard to do it when you are getting no sleep. Many caregivers feel unsure at first.
- **Loss and guilt:** It is normal to miss your old routines and independence. There's no need to feel guilty for wanting a break. Caregiving is hard work!
- **Stress in relationships:** Adjusting to parenthood can raise challenges in your relationship with your child's other parent. Many couples experience this.
- **Anger or frustration:** These feelings can come up, especially when your baby is crying and you are exhausted.

If you feel any (or all) of these, you're not alone.

Understanding your baby

- Newborns can **seem very serious**. While they smile in their sleep sometimes, they don't smile in response to things you do yet. Babies learn to smile around 2 months.
- Newborns mainly **communicate through crying**. It's how they express needs. It is not a reflection of how they feel about you. They are born ready to love you! But crying is the only way they have to tell you what they need.
- Crying often peaks around 6 weeks. Think of yourself as a detective. Be curious about what your baby might need or be experiencing. **You'll learn what your baby needs over time**.
- Your baby is **wired to bond with you**. You build that bond when you care for them.

Taking care of yourself

You can't pour from an empty cup. Your well-being matters.

- **Eat well and stay hydrated** (especially if nursing); limit caffeine.
- **Get fresh air daily** and try to do one small thing you enjoy.
- **Rest when you can** — even if it's a short nap.
- If possible, **share nighttime duties** or consider pumping so others can help with feedings.



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Making daily life easier

- **Go with the flow:** Let your baby set the pace early on. You can create routines and a schedule when your baby is older.
- **Taking care of a baby takes time.** Give yourself extra time to get out the door.
- **Set boundaries for visitors:** Choose times that work for you and limit visits if needed. This is especially important if you are recovering from surgery. Don't feel like you need to provide food or have a perfect house. That's not important right now.
- **Ask sick visitors to stay home.**

When crying feels overwhelming

It's okay to feel frustrated. But it's important to respond safely.

- If you feel overwhelmed, **place your baby in a safe space and step away for a few minutes.**
- Crying itself won't harm your baby — but reacting in anger can.
- These moments of frustration don't make you a "bad parent." Just take a moment to calm yourself before going to your baby.

Accepting help & staying connected

- **Say yes to help** — meals, errands, holding the baby, whatever you need.
- **Talk about your feelings** with your partner, friends, or family.
- **Get out of the house** when you can, even for a short walk.
- **If possible, let someone you trust take over so you can rest.**

Keeping perspective

The newborn phase is a lot! But it is temporary. During these early weeks and months, be kind to yourself. You are learning a lot every day! And your baby will teach you what you need to know.

When to seek extra support

Having a new baby can be overwhelming. Many mothers have emotional ups and downs.

Some feel sad and cry a lot after giving birth. **Reach out if your feelings are intense or last more than two weeks.** You don't have to go it alone.

You can:

- Talk to your pediatrician or OB/GYN
- **In an emergency, call 911** or go to the nearest emergency room.
- Contact Postpartum Support International (PSI)
 - 1-800-944-4773
 - www.postpartum.net/Get-Help

Have more questions?

Talk to your baby's healthcare provider or one of the professionals supporting your family.

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