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3rd Edition

Dad's Guide to Pregnancy

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



Understand the
biological changes

Learn how to be supportive
week-by-week

Navigate medical
appointments

Matthew M. F. Miller

Writer, epic father, and birth partner

Sharon Perkins

Maternal-child nurse, mom,
grandmom, and writer



Dad's Guide to Pregnancy

3rd Edition

by **Matthew M.F. Miller**
and **Sharon Perkins**

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dummies[®]
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Dad's Guide to Pregnancy For Dummies®, 3rd Edition

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Introduction

Welcome to impending fatherhood! Being a dad is better than you can ever imagine and far less scary than you probably believe it to be. One of the main reasons we wrote this book was to empower men to get actively involved in every aspect of the childbirth process, as well as the care, feeding, and nurturing of newborns. Most dads-to-be have only an elementary idea of what parenthood is going to be like, and their excitement mixes liberally with sheer terror and trepidation. We hope this book will spare you some of that fear and concern by giving you the knowledge you need to feel confident.

In the not-so-distant past, men were removed from the processes of pregnancy, labor and delivery, and even most aspects of raising children. On TV, fathers have long been portrayed as bumbling, emotionally distant fools incapable of changing diapers, getting kids to go to bed, or handling any of the routine tasks that mothers seem to do with ease. In reality, today's dad is confident, capable, and totally in love with his children — and not afraid to let it show. Not that it all comes easily and naturally. Learning how to support your pregnant partner and, subsequently, to care for a newborn takes time, effort, and education.

Most men in the world become fathers at some point, and most enter the experience without much knowledge of how babies develop, how to be a supportive partner, or what their role should be in the process. But not you. Because you're reading this book, you'll be prepared for just about anything and know exactly what it takes to be an equal partner on the pregnancy (and parenting) journey.

About This Book

This book answers all the burning questions you have about the impact your partner's pregnancy will have on your life. Of course, we tell you how your sex life will change because we know that's near the top of your list. We also explain everything you ever wanted to know about how a fetus develops, what it's like to live with a pregnant woman, and how your pocketbook will be hit by adding a new member (or members) to your family.

Additionally, we delve a little into what to expect the first six months or so after the baby arrives. We walk you through the ins and outs of feeding, changing diapers, dealing with common illnesses and emergencies, and staying sane and true to yourself through it all.

As you read this book, you'll notice a few things:

- » We use *he* and *she* interchangeably throughout because we don't know whether your baby is a boy or a girl.
- » We use the term *medical practitioner* when we talk about anyone medical because we don't know whether you're working with a doctor or midwife, a pediatrician or a nurse practitioner.
- » We call your partner *your partner* because that's what she is, in every sense.
- » We sprinkle shaded boxes throughout the text. They contain information that's interesting but not essential to the topic at hand, so feel free to skip over them if you're pressed for time.

Basically, after reading this book, you'll feel completely prepared for fatherhood. You won't actually *be*

completely prepared, because no one ever is, but you'll at least feel like you are until the baby comes.

Foolish Assumptions

Expectant dads are often the forgotten partner in the new family-to-be, and they need all the understanding they can get. If you're reading this, we assume you fall into at least one of the following categories:

- » You're an expectant dad.
- » You're hoping to become an expectant dad.
- » You're already a father but looking to learn new tricks for the next go-round.
- » You know an expectant dad and want to get into his head and understand why he's behaving the way he is.

Icons Used In This Book

Icons are another handy tool you can use as you work your way through this book. If you find the tips really helpful, for instance, you can skim through and search for that icon. Following are the icons we use in this book:



REMEMBER The Remember icon sits next to information we hope stays in your head for more than two minutes.



TIP The Tip icon gives helpful insider info that may take years to learn on your own.



WARNING Whenever we use a Warning icon, you'd better sit up and take notice, because not heeding our warning could be disastrous for you or your loved ones.

Beyond the Book

You can find a little more helpful related information at <https://www.dummies.com>, where you can peruse this book's Cheat Sheet. To get this handy resource, go to the website and type *Dad's Guide to Pregnancy For Dummies Cheat Sheet* in the Search box.

Where to Go from Here

This is where we tell you to go read the book, already!

Although you can start absolutely any place and get the benefit of our expertise, if your partner isn't yet pregnant or is newly pregnant, we suggest starting at the beginning and reading right on through. It will calm your nerves, we promise.

If you're the last-minute type of guy and you're reading this book just a few months (or weeks!) before the impending birth, you can certainly skip the first trimester stuff (at least this time around) and start wherever makes the most sense for you.

And if you got this book at the beginning of the pregnancy but never got around to opening it until now, when baby has his first case of sniffles, that's okay too — we still have plenty of valuable information for you. Pregnancy is the start of the adventure, but the fun continues long after.

Part 1

You're Going to Be a Dad (Yes, You)

IN THIS PART ...

Think about whether the time is right to consider adding someone new to your household.

Confront your fears and feelings about how having a baby will change your life.

Take stock of your readiness to become a parent, with all that parenthood entails financially, emotionally, and even physically.

Review Conception 101 to fill in the gaps in your baby-making knowledge.

Decide to make the necessary lifestyle changes to ensure success in the pregnancy department.

Deal with not being able to be physically present during pregnancy and childbirth.

Chapter 1

Welcome to Dad Land

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Exploring what it means to be a father today
 - » Taking stock of what will change in your life
 - » Facing the decision of whether to have a baby
 - » Surveying the next nine months
-

Apparently, congratulations are in order: Either you're going to be a father sometime within the next nine months or you're in the planning stages of becoming a dad. Either way, you've come to the right place. You'll face no bigger life decision than choosing to become a parent. (And no bigger jolt than being told baby is coming if you didn't expect it!) The best gift you can give to your soon-to-be child is confidence, and the only way to feel confident before becoming a parent is to prepare yourself for the journey that lies ahead.

Perhaps you're already floored by equal doses of joy and fear, which is a good sign that you recognize the magnitude of the change, but fear not — you're up for the challenge of fatherhood. Emotions run deep when confronted with the prospect of raising a child, mainly because it's a huge commitment and responsibility that, unlike a job, never has off-hours. Babies are expensive, confusing, and time consuming, and for many fathers, they represent the end of a carefree "youth" that extends well into adulthood.

Experiencing a jumble of feelings is normal, and the more you take those emotions to heart and explore what fatherhood means to you — and what kind of father you want to be — the easier the transition will be when baby arrives.

The Glorious, Frightening, Mind-Boggling World of Fatherhood

What exactly does it mean to be a father? The answer depends on the kind of father you want to be for your child. In recent years, movies, TV shows, and even commercials have begun to transition from the bumbling, know-nothing father of yore to the modern dad who's just as comfortable changing a diaper as he is fixing a car. Fathers today range from traditional to equal partners in every aspect of parenting.

Most parents today don't adhere to the traditional masculine and feminine roles that your parents and grandparents grew up with. Women work, men work, and caring for the home — inside and out — is both partners' responsibility. Today, fatherhood is a flexible word that's defined by how involved you want to be in the rearing of your child, but the more involved you are in your child's upbringing, the more likely she is to be a well-adjusted, loving, and confident person.

A father? Who, me?

Yes, you. As strange as it sounds, you're going to be a father. A great one at that, because just through the mere act of reading this book, you're taking the proverbial bull by the horns and doing your homework to

find out what it takes to be a good dad from day one. As they say, anyone can be a father, but it takes someone special to be a dad.

Even if you've never held a baby before, don't let self-doubt rule the day. Being a good father isn't about knowing everything about everything; it's about loving and caring for a baby to the best of your abilities. So don't be afraid. Yes, that's easier said than done, but being fearful of what lies ahead doesn't change the fact that you've got a baby on the way, however far off that little bundle's arrival may be.



TIP

If the thought of fatherhood scares you, you need to get used to the label, and the more you say and internalize it, the more it will become you. Start by saying the words "I'm going to be a father" out loud a few times. Maybe even look into a mirror while you say it. You may feel silly, but that's a small price to pay for a major confidence boost. (Besides, the only person who will see you is you!)

Reacting to a life-changing event

Turning into a tearful, slobbering mess upon finding out that you're going to be a father isn't unusual. Nor is throwing up, feeling faint, laughing, swearing, or any of the normal, healthy reactions people have upon receiving life-altering information.



REMEMBER If your reaction isn't 100 percent positive, that's okay, too. Just remember that your partner likely won't be particularly thrilled if you get upset, defensive, or angry when she tells you she's expecting. If you're feeling angry or scared, do your best to react to the news with calmness and class. You'll have plenty of time to revisit any concerns or frustrations after you give the situation some time to sink in.

Some dads-to-be go into fix-it mode upon hearing the news, ready and eager to crunch budget numbers, baby-proof the entire home in a single night, begin making college plans 18 years in advance, and so on. Feeling like you need to get everything in order before baby arrives is normal, but remember that you can't do it all in a day. Take some time to celebrate before you dive into the practical side of life with baby. (For more advice on handling the big news, refer to [Chapter 4](#).)

Dealing with fatherhood fears

Even men who've been lucky enough to be surrounded by positive male role models find themselves doubting whether they have what it takes to be a dad. It's like the fear of starting a new job amplified by 100. Part of being a good father is taking the time to confront these fears so that when baby comes, you don't parent with fear. Following are some of the common fear-based questions men ask themselves in regard to fatherhood:

- » Am I ready to give up my present life (free time, flexibility, freedom) to be a dad?
- » Will I have time for my pastimes and friends?

- » Will I ever sleep again?
- » Is this the end of my marriage and sex life as I know it?
- » Do we have enough money to raise a child?
- » Do I know enough about kids to be a good dad?
- » Am I mature enough to be a good role model for my child?
- » What if the baby comes and I don't love him?

Your head may be spinning with all the questions you ask yourself, and although you can't answer them all right away, you need to address them at some point. However, plenty of men have felt unprepared and unwilling to become fathers and turned out to be great dads, so don't despair if your initial answers to the preceding questions are mostly negative.

Parenthood involves a lot of sacrifice, but it doesn't have to sound the death knell for your identity or happiness. Talk with your partner, a trusted friend, or a therapist — anyone who will listen to you and support your concerns without getting defensive — about the questions you have. You'll find that some of your fears have no basis in reality and that others — such as the fear of losing yourself and your free time — require you to reprioritize your time and energy.



WARNING Regardless of what your fears may be, don't let them fester. No man is an island, and you can't effectively deal with all those emotions by yourself. Starting an open dialogue with your partner keeps you both on the same page, which is a good start toward making you two an effective parenting duo.

Debunking six common myths

Many of the concerns or fears you may have about fatherhood likely originated from the long-standing myths of what a father's role should be in his child's life. Not all that long ago, men stood in the waiting room at the hospital during delivery and returned to work the next day. Nowadays, the landscape of fatherhood is vastly different, leaving the modern dad wondering where he fits in the parenting scheme.

The following sections outline some of the most common misconceptions about fatherhood. We debunk these myths to help you understand how to be a more-involved father.

Myth #1: Only the mom-to-be should have input about labor and delivery

Though the focus is on your partner — she is, after all, the one carrying your child — you also matter, and you have the right to voice your opinions along the way. Throughout the pregnancy, share what you're experiencing and let her know what scares you. She has a lot to think through and worry about, too, but the more you deal with those issues together, the stronger your relationship will become.

If you have thoughts and opinions about what kind of delivery option you're most comfortable with, share those with her as well. Although ultimately you need to let your partner pick the childbirth option that's best for her, she deserves to know your feelings on the matter. Getting involved in the decision-making process isn't just your right — it's the right thing to do. (Check out [Chapter 9](#) to start getting informed on birthing options and the many decisions you'll need to make.)

Myth #2: Men aren't ideal caretakers for newborns

Boobs are generally the issue at the forefront of this myth. No, you can't breast-feed your child or know what it's like to give birth. Because a lot of fathers don't have that initial connection, they wonder what exactly they're supposed to do.

Mother and baby are attached to each other for nine months, but after baby arrives, it's open season on bonding and caretaking. When your partner isn't breast-feeding, hold, rock, and engage in skin-to-skin contact with your baby whenever possible. Changing diapers, bathing, and changing clothes are just a few of the activities you can do to get involved. And the more involved you get, the less likely you are to feel left out of the equation. [Chapter 11](#) provides tips for caring for your new baby so you can feel confident in your abilities.

Myth #3: You'll never have sex or sleep ever again

Good things come to those who wait, and you'll have to wait. Sex won't happen for at least six to eight weeks following delivery, and even then you have a long road back to normalcy. For many couples, a normal sex life after childbirth isn't as active as it once was, but you can work with your partner to make sure both of your needs are being met.

One need that will deter your sex life — and override the sex need — is sleep. Babies don't sleep through the night. They wake up hungry and demand an alert parent to feed them, burp them, and soothe them back to sleep. Some babies begin sleeping through the night at six months; other kids don't until the age of 3. The good news is that they all do it eventually, and when you begin to understand your baby's patterns, you'll be able to

figure out a routine that allows you to maximize the shut-eye you get every day.

Myth #4: Active fathers can't succeed in the business world

Unless work is the only obligation you've ever had in your adult life, you're probably used to juggling more than one thing. Fathers who are active in the community or fill their schedules with copious hours of hobbies have to reevaluate their priorities. Family comes first, work comes second, and with the support of a loving partner and a few good babysitters, you can continue on your career trajectory as planned.

In fact, being a dad may just make you a more effective worker. Having so many demands on your time can make you better at time management and maximizing your workday. Focus on work at work and home at home and you'll succeed in both arenas.

Myth #5: You're destined to become your father

Destiny is really just a code word for the tendency many men have to mimic their father's behaviors, good or bad. If you didn't like an aspect of your father's parenting or don't want to repeat a major mistake that he perpetrated, talk about it with your partner. The more you talk about it, the less likely you are to repeat that mistake because you'll engage your partner as a support system working with you to help you avoid it.



TIP

At the same time, don't forget to replicate and celebrate the things your father did right. You'll be chilled to the bone the first time you say something that your father used to say, but remember that repeating the good actions isn't a bad thing. Don't try to be different from your father "just because." Identify what he did that was right and what was wrong and use that as a blueprint for your parenting style.

Myth #6: You'll fall in love with baby at first sight

Babies aren't always so beautiful right after being born, but that's to be expected, given what they've just gone through to enter the world. Don't feel guilty if you look at your baby and aren't immediately enamored with her (them). Emotions are difficult to control, and for some fathers — and even mothers — falling head over heels for your baby may take some time.

Childbirth is a long, intense experience (as we describe in [Chapter 10](#)), so allow yourself adequate time to rest and get to know the new addition to your family. If you suffer from feelings of regret or extreme sadness, or if you experience thoughts of harming yourself or the baby, seek immediate medical assistance.

Becoming a Modern Dad

Dads today are involved in every aspect of a child's life. They're no longer relegated to teaching sports, roughhousing, and serving as disciplinarians. Modern fatherhood is all about using your strengths, talents, and

interests to shape your relationship and interactions with your child.

Modern dads change diapers, feed the baby, wake up in the middle of the night to care for a crying child, and take baby for a run. They don't "baby-sit" their children; they're capable parents, and no job falls outside the realm of their capabilities. Though all that involvement does mean you'll put in far more effort and time than previous generations, it also means that you're bridging the gap of emotional distance that used to be so prevalent in the father-child experience.

The sections that follow (and the chapters in [Part 4](#)) offer information and advice on making changes and stepping into the practical role of daddy.

Changes in your personal life

If what you fear most is losing the freedom to spend as much time as you want engaging in leisure activities, then you're in for some life-altering sacrifices. Babies require you to say no to a lot of commitments that the prebaby you would have been eager to engage in. Don't make a lot of outside-the-home plans that you consider optional, at least at first.

For the first six months, going out at night is challenging, especially if your partner is breast-feeding and/or you don't live near family. However, as your baby ages, leaving him with a babysitter becomes more feasible and less stressful.

Perhaps what you fear the most is the impact baby will have on your relationship with your partner. This fear is valid, given that you'll scarcely find time for the two of you to be alone. But that doesn't mean you won't have time to connect.



TIP

Just because going out as a couple is tough to manage doesn't mean you can't have ample one-on-one time. Plan stay-in dates that start at baby's bedtime. Order food or make an elegant dinner, queue up a movie, or play your favorite board game. Try not to talk about baby. Rather, focus on each other and talk about topics that interest you both.

Changes in your professional life

Depending on the requirements of your job, your daily routine may go completely unchanged aside from the uptick in yawns due to late-night feedings and fussiness. Thoughts of your new family may make focusing difficult, especially when you first return to work following any paternity leave or vacation time you take. It won't be long, though, before you settle back into a normal routine, and work just may become the one arena of your life that provides a respite from parenting duties.

Workaholics, however, find themselves at a crossroads. Some choose to cut back on hours spent at the office, whereas others, hopefully with the full support of their partners, proceed with business as usual. There's no right or wrong way to balance a demanding job with a new baby as long as you and your partner are comfortable with the arrangement and you spend enough quality time with your child.

What is quality time? It's time you spend with your child, focusing *on* your child. Some people say quality time has nothing to do with the quantity of time you spend with your child, but we feel that it's affected by the amount of time you devote to your child. Give as much as you can because the old adage is true — they grow up so fast.