

Parent Express

A GUIDE FOR YOU AND YOUR BABY



TOPIC

Becoming a parent

**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 you and 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!



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

**Cooperative
Extension Service**

Agriculture and Natural Resources
Family and Consumer Sciences
4-H Youth Development
Community and Economic Development

MARTIN-GATTON COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND ENVIRONMENT

Educational programs of Kentucky Cooperative Extension serve all people regardless of economic or social status and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, religion, political belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, marital status, genetic information, age, veteran status, physical or mental disability or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity. Reasonable accommodation of disability may be available with prior notice. Program information may be made available in languages other than English. University of Kentucky, Kentucky State University, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Kentucky Counties, Cooperating. Lexington, KY 40506



Disabilities
accommodated
with prior notification.

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

It is important for pregnant women to eat a healthy, well-balanced diet. This helps ensure that all adequate nutrients are received for a healthy pregnancy and development of the baby. Focus on adding fruits and vegetables into every meal or snack. Whole grain food products will help provide extra fiber for improved digestion and keep blood sugar levels stable. Low-fat dairy items provide the calcium needed to keep your bones strong and help baby's develop. Look for lean protein options, such as plant-based items (beans, peas, nuts, seeds), poultry, and seafood. These food items provide the building blocks necessary for baby's development.

Every day, drink eight to twelve 8-ounce glasses of water. Staying hydrated during pregnancy has many benefits including improved digestion, healthy functioning of the placenta, reduced fatigue, swelling, and overheating. If you are tired of water, there are other ways to get the adequate amount of fluids each day. Other nutritious liquids include low-fat milk, small amounts of unsweetened fruit and vegetable juices, and sparkling or flavored waters. Fresh fruits are largely made of water, so they are another source of healthy fluids. Avoid beverages that add no nutrition and unnecessary calories, such as sugar-sweetened

It takes time to feel comfortable in your new role as a parent. Be patient with yourself.





beverages. Limit caffeine each day to no more than 200mg (approximately 2 cups of coffee).

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. Talk to your healthcare provider about healthy weight gain for your pre-baby weight and height.

Now that you're pregnant, talk with your healthcare provider about prenatal vitamins. This should be one of the first conversations you have with your healthcare provider once you know you are expecting. They are rich in folic acid, iron, and calcium. Each of these nutrients are critical in the growth and development of your baby. It is important to keep in mind that taking a prenatal vitamin does not replace consuming a healthy diet. Taking a daily vitamin is a supplement that ensure you receive the nutrients you and your baby need during pregnancy.

Pregnancy is a good time to start paying more attention to food safety in addition to healthy food choices. Be sure any meat, fish, poultry, or

eggs you eat are well-cooked and that fresh fruits and vegetables are washed well before eating. Toxoplasmosis, listeria, salmonella, and other food-borne illness 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. Pregnant women 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. A quick internet search will allow you 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/>.



- 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 Mallory 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.
- Murkoff, H. E. (2016). *What to expect when you're expecting* (5th ed.). New York: Workman.
- Gnatuk, C. A., & Quick, S. (2002). *Care for Yourself, Key No. 1, FCS7-179. Keys to great parenting: Fun and learning with your baby or toddler* (Rev. ed.) Lexington, KY: Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.
- Lerner, C., & Dombro, A. L. (2000). *Learning and growing together: Understanding and supporting your child's development*. Washington, DC: Zero to Three. Phone: (800) 899-4301.
- Minnesota Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. P.O. Box 131911, Roseville, MN 55113-0021. <http://www.mofas.org>
- Pruett, K. D. (2000). *Fatherneed: Why father care is as essential as mother care for your child*. New York: Broadway.
- Sears, W., & Sears, M. (2013). *The baby book*. New York: Harper Thornsons.
- United States Department of Agriculture. (2017). *Nutritional Needs During Pregnancy*. Retrieved from <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/nutritional-needs-during-pregnancy>
- United States Department of Agriculture. (2017). *Pregnancy Weight Gain Calculator*. Retrieved from <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/pregnancy-weight-gain-calculator>

Sources and Recommended Readings

- American Academy of Pediatrics. (2017). *New mother's guide to breastfeeding* (3rd ed.). New York: Bantam Books.
- Brazelton, T. B., & Sparrow, J. D. (2006). *Touchpoints: Your child's emotional and behavioral development* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, MA: Da Capo.
- Brott, A. A., & Ash, J. (2015). *The expectant father: Facts, tips, and advice for dads-to-be* (4th ed.). New York: Abbeville.

Parent Express

For more information, contact:

David A. Weisenhorn, Ph.D.,
Extension Specialist for Parenting and Child Development

Adapted from a publication originally written by Dorothea Cudaback, D.S.W., and colleagues at the University of California Cooperative Extension.

Professionals at the University of Kentucky who have assisted in the preparation of the Parent Express series: Sandra Bastin, Ph.D., R.D., L.D.; Donna Clore, M.S.; Ruth Ann Crum, M.S.; Darlene Forester, Ph.D., R.D.; Starr Gantz, R.D.; Carole Gnatuk, Ed.D.; Peter Hesseldenz, M.A.; Janet Kurzynske, Ph.D., R.D.; Alex Lesueur, Jr., M.S.L.S.; Suzanne McGough, M.S., R.D.; Heather Norman-Burgdolf, Ph.D.; Marilyn Peterson, R.N., B.S.N.; Larry Piercy, Ph.D.; Sam Quick, Ph.D.; Michael Rupured, M.S.; Tammy Stephenson, Ph.D.; Diane Strangis, M.S.; Janet Tietyen, Ph.D., R.D., L.D.; David Weisenhorn, Ph.D.

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.
<https://extension.ca.uky.edu/county>

