

Becoming parents: the partner's role in the couple



About to become parents? Just had a baby? This fact sheet will help you adapt to this new reality.

What changes when we become parents?

Pregnancy and a baby's arrival not only change daily life, they also have an emotional impact. The two parents don't experience these events in the same way. And not at the same time, either. For example, a partner may only become aware of his or her new role as a parent when the baby is born. Here are some things to consider.



Patience, support, listening, and communication will help you carry out your family plan successfully.

LIFE AS A COUPLE

Going from being a couple to being a family and looking after a newborn isn't always easy! Sometimes you'll need a little time and support to adapt.

A baby doesn't raise the same concerns among all parents. Some worry primarily about health or financial issues. Others worry about the baby's safety or about lifestyle changes.



It's important to talk about these issues as a couple or with loved ones. This will help you find solutions. After the birth, taking breaks as a couple can also be helpful to create a balance.

EMOTIONS AND MENTAL HEALTH

The partner often experiences different emotions, positive and negative. These emotions, which are completely normal, can be:

- joy, excitement, pride, and admiration for the spouse
- discomfort during gynecological exams, powerlessness in the face of labour pains, feelings of rejection after the birth

- relief that the delivery is over, or baby blues (lack of interest in the baby, or loss of appetite, for example)

Pay attention to your emotions and express them if that helps you. Being involved at every step of the birth could also help you manage them. See the suggestions later in this sheet.

Consult a health professional if you feel the need, for example, because of:

- worries
- negative thoughts about yourself
- angry outbursts
- irritability, anxiety
- alcohol or drug use

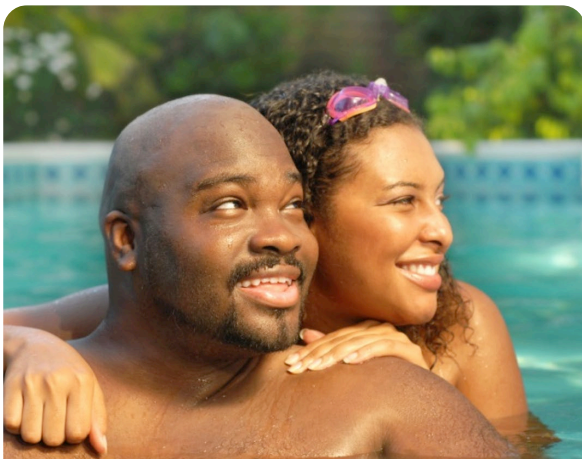
LIFESTYLE HABITS

Your lifestyle habits influence those of your pregnant partner.

Some changes can be beneficial for the whole family. The fitter you are, the more available you will be to welcome your child.

Here are some tips.

- If you can't quit smoking, smoke outside the home. Second-hand smoke harms your partner's health and the baby's health.
- Help your partner stop using alcohol or drugs. Respect her choice and modify your own use to support her. Try non-alcoholic cocktails ("mocktails").
- Do exercises together. Exercise is recommended for pregnant women, and this is a great opportunity to do an activity as a couple.
- Eat a healthy diet.



SEXUAL ACTIVITY

> During pregnancy

Desire and sexuality can change, especially in the mother-to-be. This is normal. Pregnancy causes both physical (weight gain, body changes) and emotional changes. This can have an impact on sexuality. Listen to your partner and talk about it.

> After delivery

You can have sex as soon as you feel ready as a couple. Fatigue, caring for the baby, bleeding, scarring of the perineum, and hormonal changes can inhibit a woman's desire for sex. The vagina may also be drier during the first few months after giving birth. In such cases, an unscented lubricant can make sex easier.



DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know that a woman can become pregnant in the first weeks after giving birth, even if she is breastfeeding?

CONTRACEPTION

It's important to use a contraception method as soon as you start having sex again.



What role can I play during the pregnancy?

Everything you do will help you welcome your child. For example, you can:

- prepare the baby's room or set up the house
- communicate with your baby by talking to him or her or touching your spouse's belly



- help relieve the discomfort and fatigue caused by pregnancy (give massages, prepare meals, help with household tasks)
- stay informed about the progress of the pregnancy, attend some appointments, present your questions to the care team
- become informed by reading the guide *From Tiny Tot to Toddler*, the CHUM health fact sheets, or the website *Naître et grandir* [French only].

How can I be involved in the hospital delivery?

Before, during, and right after the delivery, your presence is important.

Here are some suggestions:

- Talk about what role you might play during the labour and what you can do to help alleviate her pain. This could involve massage, pressure points, position changes, breathing, or hot compresses.
- Pay attention to your spouse's needs. Her moods and needs can change very quickly during labour.

- Help her to relax. Use encouraging words, speak gently.
- Provide ways for her to feel refreshed, such as with cool washcloths.
- Create a calm ambiance in the room: dim the lights, put on soft music
- Ask questions and take on your role alongside the care team.

What role can I play AFTER the delivery?

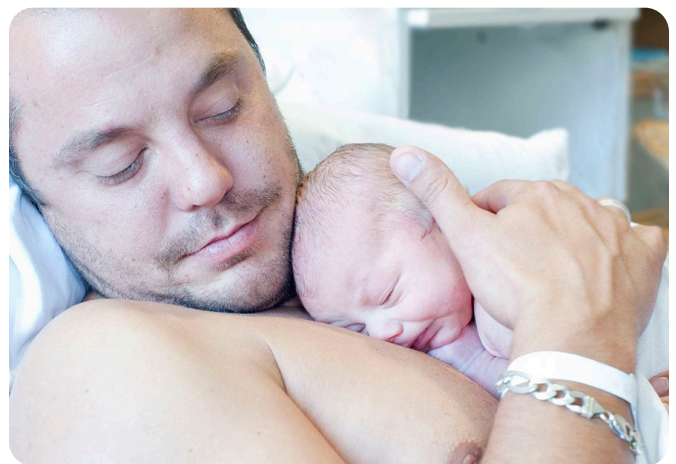
Once the baby is there, you begin to form your identity as a parent. The baby's actual presence might scare you. It's normal to not know what to do.

Here are some suggestions for creating a relationship with your baby.

> When the baby is awake, you can:

- Burp the baby.
- Play with, and talk to, him or her.
- Give the baby a bath.
- Massage or rock him or her.

The more you engage with your baby, the more you'll feel competent and better understand his or her needs. Physical (skin-to-skin) contact with your baby has many benefits. See the fact sheet [**Skin-to-Skin Contact.**](#)



> **During breastfeeding, you can:**

- Support your spouse and maintain a positive attitude. This is especially important in those times when breastfeeding is more difficult.
- Help your spouse with latching: by positioning cushions or pillows, placing or covering the baby, etc.
- Help your spouse to rest by doing household tasks or looking after the other children.



> **If the baby is being bottle-fed:**

Prepare the bottle and feed the baby.

When taking care of your baby, you don't do things in the same way as your spouse, and that's okay. It's important that your spouse lets you do things differently or following another rhythm than hers. Your baby will get to know you.

Who can I contact if I have questions?

Ask a nurse or doctor in the Birthing Centre. They will refer you to other resources, if needed.

At any time, you can call Info-Santé at **8-1-1**.



USEFUL RESOURCES

From Tiny Tot to Toddler: A Practical Guide for Parents from Pregnancy to Age Two. A copy of this guide was given to you at your first visit. You can also consult it online:

> inspq.qc.ca/en/tiny-tot

Naître et grandir (French only):

> naitreetgrandir.com

A website developed by fathers for fathers:

> newdadmanual.ca

To learn more about pregnancy, delivery, or follow-up care, visit our website.



Videos, other fact sheets, and more resources are available at:

centredesnaissanceschum.com

The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal
chumontreal.qc.ca