

HOW TO REDUCE NEW PARENT STRESS

by Melanie Bowden

Many couples plan for the wedding, but not for the marriage. A similar situation can occur when expectant parents anticipate their baby's arrival. They plan for the birth, but not for their own needs during the postpartum months.

Instead, prepare for those early months with your baby and be a less stressed-out parent for it.

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF SLEEP DEPRIVATION

Feeding and caring for a newborn is an around the clock job. Newborns eat every two to three hours, yet adults need a seven to nine hour stretch of sleep to function well. Night after night of broken sleep will wear out the most energetic parent.

The old advice of sleeping whenever the baby does is crucial. Although you may have a hundred things to do, your body needs to rest. Don't hesitate to ask others to come over and watch the baby so you can nap.

Learn methods to soothe a crying baby. In his book *The Happiest Baby on the Block*, Dr. Harvey Karp outlines the 5 S's Method for calming a baby. In order the steps are: Swaddle the baby, hold him in a Side or Stomach lying position, Shush loudly in his ear, Swing him from side to side, and then give him something to Suck on. It really works.

Other things to try: wearing your baby in a sling, rocking your baby, taking her for a walk or a car ride, and playing music.

HOUSEHOLD MANAGEMENT

Do as much as you can in advance to free up your household duties. Freeze meals--casseroles are good. Other easy meals are salads, soups, sandwiches, or even pancakes for dinner.

Stock your home with non-perishables. You don't want to be running to the store two days postpartum for toilet paper. Paper plates, cups, and plastic utensils will give you a break from dishwashing for a while.

Lower your housecleaning standards big time. Meg North, a mother of one, says, "I wish I had asked friends to stay with me to help and stopped worrying about how my house looked." Rest and time to get to know your baby should be the priorities, not cleaning.

Simplify household chores. Clean out clutter so you have less to dust. Organize your house so items are near where you use them. Use a laundry basket system that allows you to sort dirty clothes when you take them off. For example, one basket for darks and one for lights in each bedroom.

Wash baby clothes in advance (they may contain chemicals that irritate baby's skin), but don't wash everything. You probably have more infant clothes than your baby will ever wear, so set some of them aside to exchange later for bigger clothes or a store credit.

Set up diaper changing and baby feeding areas on each floor of your house. Some nice items for a feeding area are: burp cloths, a water bottle, a breastfeeding pillow for nursing moms, books, or a journal.

ALL THE GUESTS

Spread out your visitors as much as possible. Maybe dad is home for two weeks, and then grandma comes. Plan for four to six weeks of hands-on help if possible. You might want to hire a postpartum doula who will help care for the baby and mom, do household chores, answer questions about breastfeeding, and even run errands.

It's okay to set a time limit on visits or say that you won't be having guests until after a certain number of weeks. Answering the door in your bathrobe also gets the message across quickly that you're too tired for socializing!

PUT TOGETHER YOUR POSTPARTUM PLAN

In the book *Mothering the New Mother*, author Sally Placksin includes a list of phone numbers to have on hand. A lactation consultant, new parents' support group, housecleaner, local grocery stores and restaurants that deliver, and the numbers of friends and neighbors who have offered to help can be on your list.

Think about all the groups you are involved with--places of worship,

coworkers, sports teams--and let people know you'd appreciate whatever help they are comfortable providing.

Along with baby items, ask for gifts that will support the new parents. A meal for your freezer or a gift certificate for housecleaning or a postpartum massage make wonderful presents. Some expectant parents ask for donations to a doula fund.

Check with your employer and health insurance about postpartum benefits they provide. They may pay for a doula, visiting nurse, or other types of support.

PLAN AHEAD FOR A HAPPY "BABYMOON"

Having a postpartum plan in place can bring relief during a stressful time. As Jennifer DeLugach, a mother of three, says, "My husband and I put together a postpartum plan similar to a birth plan where we arranged for the help we would need." The result? "We had a wonderful baby moon."

Melanie Bowden is a Davis mother of two, writer, writing coach, and certified postpartum doula. Download a free chapter of her book **Why Didn't Anyone Tell Me? True Stories of New Motherhood** at motherhood.booklocker.com. Reach Melanie at melaniebowden@earthlink.net.

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