



Know What to Expect



# NEW PARENT STRESS

Instead of having one of those cute, clean babies you see in commercials, you have a crying, endlessly dirty one. Your life has changed more than you had ever imagined. You're hopelessly in love with your child, but will you ever have the energy to enjoy it? Being prepared for these stresses can lessen their impact and enhance the joy a new baby brings to a family.

## HOW ARE YOU FEELING?

New mothers can be plagued by strong emotions and doubts. You love your baby, but you may have been unprepared for the accompanying personal and work-related changes. You may feel an added burden if you have a fussy or colicky baby. Changes in your body's post-pregnancy appearance can be distressing. At times you may feel overwhelmed by your new responsibility.

Today, new fathers take a more active role in pregnancy, childbirth and child care than their fathers did. The richness of this new experience can leave fathers exhausted, overwhelmed and numb. They enjoy watching their wives care for the child but sometimes feel jealous of their closeness. They may then feel guilty. Worries about money and planning for the baby's future may also plague them.

## SEXUAL CHANGES

As a new parent, your life is controlled by the "F word"—fatigue. Life is lived in snatches between feedings and diaper changes. Beyond baby, very little else seems to get done. Talking and feeling intimate may be at an all time low. Some couples find a new "normal" sex life soon after the baby is born. But if you're like many couples, trying to



find the energy, the time and a non-crying infant becomes mission impossible. Be patient. Some parents say it's six to 12 months before their sex life is again "normal." It takes planning, maybe a relative or friend to babysit, and occasional afternoon trysts to restore some of the old zest.

## WHEN TO SEEK HELP

A sense of humor and time will heal many of the problems of parenting. Talk over concerns with your spouse and discuss parenting with friends so that you see your problems aren't unique. But if you're experiencing a troubling change in your couple relationship,

severe depression or continued anger toward your spouse or baby, then it's time to seek professional help. For long-term sexual problems or painful intercourse, start with your doctor to see if there is a physical problem. If there isn't, you may benefit from counseling help. Seeking help, when in doubt, can help restore the happiness a baby can bring.

## PARENTS' SURVIVAL CHECKLIST

- ✍ Rest during baby's naps.
- ✍ Accomplish only one thing per day.
- ✍ Give each other gifts of alone time.
- ✍ Have dates as often as possible.
- ✍ Keep a daily journal.
- ✍ Remember the "non-parent" things you love about yourself.
- ✍ Don't expect too much of yourself or spouse.
- ✍ If you're a single parent, develop a network of friends and family to help out.