



Taking care of yourself

Becoming a parent brings lots of different experiences and emotions. Joy, pleasure and excitement are a few. So too are tiredness and a feeling that life has changed beyond your recognition. During those early months and years of being a parent, taking care of your baby seems to take up all of your energy. Your baby is your focus in life and it's very hard to think about anything else.

The importance of taking good care of yourself can't be overstated. We all have bad days. The important thing is to recognize that when bad days outnumber good days, then it's time to take a step back and think about how you can change the situation.

Taking care of yourself can make a significant difference to how you experience those early years of parenthood. The better you feel and the more energy you have, then it's more likely that you'll feel more positive about the whole experience or raising a child.

It's worth noting that the earlier you can establish good habits the better. You will feel more able to cope with the challenges that raising a child can bring. Taking good care of yourself doesn't just mean looking after your health, although of course, it is important. It's just not possible to separate your physical health from how you feel inside, so both your inner and outer wellbeing should be given equal consideration.

Get more rest

Lack of sleep is to be expected to a certain extent. This is a time of change for you and your baby and you're bound to struggle to get the requisite number of hours' sleep each night. The best way to avoid exhaustion during those early months is to grab the chance to sleep whenever you can. Don't feel guilty about taking short naps during the day. When your baby sleeps, sit down, close your eyes and relax too. Of course, it is tempting to start ironing or catch up on other household tasks, but try to resist this temptation.

Eat healthy, live healthy

Raising a baby takes a certain amount of stamina.

To make sure that you have enough energy to do that, you need to look after your body and to keep it refuelled and ready for the exertions ahead. You may feel too busy to eat or maybe you're just too tired to think about preparing food. Either way, it's important to get into the habit of eating regular balanced meals during the day, just as if you were at work. Fast food meals may seem like the easy option, but aren't always the best solution for you over the long term. Instead, get into the habit of preparing simple food in advance. Likewise, consider taking time out to exercise. It can stimulate energy and will lead to you having a healthier lifestyle. Exercising can be as simple as taking your baby out in the buggy for a walk round the park. If you've had a particularly demanding day, then getting out and about in the fresh air will work wonders for both of you.

Set aside some 'me' time

It is unrealistic to expect anyone to go from having all the free time they like to no free time at all. Yet this is often the case when a new baby arrives in a family. New parents feel that they have to be constantly present and kept busy caring for their baby. However, a relaxed parent for most of the time is so much better for a baby than an overstressed parent that's there for them every minute of the day. Both you and your partner need time to relax. Carve out some "me" time and you can start to redress the balance within your life and feel better able to cope with any challenges. By taking up a new hobby or rediscovering one that you used to enjoy, such as walking or reading, you can start focusing on your own wellbeing. You will also be more aware of the wider world around you. If you're feeling isolated because you don't have the



same social life as before, then your “me” time may include arranging to meet a friend for coffee.

Embrace offers of help

Looking after a baby can be demanding, both physically and mentally. It involves time, energy and patience. Many parents tend to feel that they must cope entirely on their own and that, if they can't, then they are not good parents. Being able to accept help is a major part of looking after your wellbeing. Without it, you may find it hard to take time out, go for a meal with your partner, or get that much-needed extra sleep. Whether it's help around the house or the offer to look after your baby for a few minutes or a few hours, don't feel afraid to accept support. It will make your transition to a new life as a parent so much easier.

Talk

When you're stressed and overwhelmed with all that you have to do, it's easy to stop talking to those around you, whether it's a partner, close friend or relative. Try to be open with others rather than keep your feelings to yourself. Arrange your day or evening so that you can spend some time with your partner and have an opportunity to talk – undisturbed by your baby. By keeping the lines of communication open and sharing your thoughts, you can feel better in yourself.

Of course, there will inevitably be days when you feel that it's not gone as well as you'd like. Perhaps you haven't been able to settle your baby for her lunchtime sleep. Maybe you've felt frustrated because you haven't been able to get on with your household chores or have time to talk to your partner. When you feel suddenly overwhelmed, it's important to take action straightaway. First, make sure that your baby is safe. Then make a cup of tea or other drink. Step into the garden to enjoy a few moments of fresh air or read a magazine.

The better you look after yourself, the more you will enjoy being a parent. Remember that your baby is an important member of your family – and so are you.