

# The baby is heading home: Are you ready?



Byron Dobson, Tallahassee Democrat 10:55 p.m. EDT April 20, 2015



(Photo: Joe Rondone/Democrat)

Bringing a newborn home is one of the most life-changing experiences a mother will ever face, experts say. And it's best if the mother has been prepared through the preceding months of pre-natal care to make sure that she and her support system are ready to provide the baby with the best care and nurturing available at home.

And, while there is a wealth of material available on everything from diaper-changing to breastfeeding, the hardest thing for a mom to understand is to take a step back and not put any more pressure on herself than normal. The baby, will provide enough of those challenges.

"This is easier said than done, but if you have a healthy baby, relax a little, and take cues from the baby," said

Donna Poynor, director of program services for March of Dimes, Florida chapter.

"The baby will let them know when he or she is hungry," she said. "Within a day or so, mom and dad will know the difference between a hungry cry and a diaper needs changing cry and a "hey, you-forgot-to-burp-me cry.

"After a couple of days, the baby will give lots of cues. They do have ways of communicating, particularly to moms. They have, within a few hours of birth, this bonding process. They recognize their mother's voice from hearing it inside, now they are hearing it from the outside."

And, while that bonding is almost instant, there are some tips and suggestions that new mothers need to understand, now that the baby is home.

Dr. Nicole McCoy, a pediatric hospitalist for Pediatrix Medical Group at Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare, said there are some practical guidelines for new mothers to understand, including the fact that they are going to need help.

"I always tell new parents, don't feel bad asking for help," she said, referring to family, friends, church members. "You are going to be sleep-deprived. It's going to be physical."

Here are some other suggestions she has for new mothers:

- Initial weight loss: Understand that there will be some weight loss with a newborn as it gets rid of extra body fat after birth.
  - Safe sleeping: The baby should always lay on his or her back in an air crib or bassinet when parents are sleeping. No stuffed animals or pillow should be in the crib or bassinet.
- "Sleep when the baby is sleeping," McCoy said, adding that it is healthy for the mother and other family members.
- Belly-button stump: Don't panic. That's natural from cutting the umbilical cord. "That scab falls off in about a week," McCoy said. "It's usually from drainage or something. It's normal. You don't want to saturate the umbilical cord because it could lead to infection. You just want to leave it alone until it falls off."

- Bathing: Babies don't need a bath every day. Parents can use a sink, as long as it is sanitized, rather than buying an expensive infant bath tub. Babies can be washed with any mild soap (TMH uses Johnson & Johnson's Head to Toe).

"Parents are hesitant to wash the hair because they are worried about the baby's soft spot on their scalp," McCoy said. "I encourage parents to wash their baby's hair, especially the soft spot. If not, cradle cap (or a crustiness on the scalp) can build up."

- Know your pediatrician: "We recommend following up with your pediatrician in one to two days (after discharge)," McCoy said. (A pediatrician must be identified when the mother comes in for delivery and it is recommended that meetings with the pediatrician are held ahead of time).

- Checking for fever: Parents should feel comfortable in checking a baby's fever through the rectum. "You are not going to hurt the baby." A fever can tell you if something is wrong. A reading of 100.4 is an indication of a fever.

- Vaccinations: McCoy said the only required vaccination for a newborn is for Hepatitis-B which can be given within the newborn nursery or within one month. Other vaccinations begin after two months and in the care of the pediatrician.

McCoy said some parents opt out of giving their newborn additional vaccinations for a variety of reasons:

The mother wasn't vaccinated

A previous child had an adverse reaction

A personal belief that vaccinations are not needed.

McCoy said parents need to understand this could put the child at high risk.

There's plenty of information for new mothers, from breastfeeding to the proper way of changing diapers. So, what's the best advice for new mothers against to ward off information overload?

"The new mom needs to learn this is her baby," Poynor said. "She needs to be in tune with her baby. It's helpful to read and become as informed as possible and mom will learn more from her baby than she ever will from reading."

## WHAT READERS SAY

Here is some advice from Facebook readers:

**Sharon Moskowitz:** Accept help. Better: List very specific jobs you could use help with before the baby arrives, so when people show up saying, "What can I do?" you don't have to think about it, just point to the next item on the list. Casseroles and cute baby clothes are very nice, but think doing dishes, getting laundry done, holding baby for 20 minutes so you can take a shower.

Also, remember that each baby is different. Even the very best advice given based on real-life experience may not fit your family. Trust your pediatrician and your gut (backed by appropriate levels of research based on the actual impact of the decision at hand), but take all others with a grain of salt.

**Tim Hare:** If the cry just seems angry, not starving, not stuck with a diaper pin, not nonspecific pain, then it's OK to let the baby cry itself to sleep. I was running in all the time, basically the baby was training me in a Pavlovian way... After the pediatrician told me to cut that out, the baby learned that bedtime was sleep time and slept, well, like a baby.

**Lisa Stein:** I'd say, if you are breastfeeding, it can take quite a while before it gets easy. And it's tough to do something as often as 10 times a day that you may not feel confident about. If you can stick with it, it not only gets easier, it gets actually easy. Tune in to the caveman part of your brain and "just be" during feedings.

**Pamela Smith:** Mine usually went to sleep in the sling, and then I put them down. Slings, by the way, are amazing, and the one "baby gadget" I couldn't live without. It's well worth going somewhere that you can try a few different styles, with people who know how to wear them. My favorite was the Maya-style.

**Lynda Moultry Belcher:** Motherhood is a unique rhythm that you create for yourself. You will receive advice from family, friends and strangers, which is great. In the end, however, your routine has to work for you and that might be something totally different than what worked for someone else.

Take time for yourself. You are at your best for your baby when you are rested, somewhat rejuvenated and relaxed. Anytime you can get a break, take it.

**Elizabeth Ricci:** Get the night's clothes/diapers and next day's clothes/diapers out and ready before bed. Don't buy a wipe warmer or go crazy heating up food. Cool and tepid food is fine. Babies live well all over the world without many of our first world contraptions.

**Rosanne Dunkelberger:** Tag team caring for baby, with one parent "on" and the other "off" during certain times of the day. That way, if the baby fussed or needed something, one of us knew who should respond.

**Michelle Marra Morton:** S/he's not giving you a hard time — s/he's having a hard time.

**Lauren Shoaf Pace:** First thing to know & accept is there's no way to prepare for motherhood. It rocks your world like nothing else ever has or will, but is worth every minute.

Bringing a baby home is an adjustment for everyone — you, spouse & baby.

Embrace & enjoy the opportunity to spend time with/get to know your baby ... for moms that work outside the home, maternity leave goes fast.

Accept that some days you will get nothing done, other than feeding the baby & changing diapers (and that's OK).

Remind your spouse & mother how much you love them

**Ivette A. López:** Breastfeed, even if for a month, for any time at all. Makes a huge difference. Make things simple when you can. Enjoy the ride, laugh and take lots of pictures. Take notes of the details, write, so you always remember and can help your kid when their time comes. You think you will always remember details, but they fade away. Take it easy!

**Samadhi Jones:** I wasn't prepared mentally or emotionally for the dizzying array of feelings. It's good that the nesting instinct kicked in and the house was dazzlingly clean, or I could have tipped over the edge. Here's some advice: get someone to actually help you, if you are a single mom or if your husband/bf/significant other is useless as a helpmate. Otherwise you can become sleep deprived and overwhelmed.

For more information, visit [www.marchofdimes.org](http://www.marchofdimes.org)

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