

# Adjusting After Your Baby's Birth

Having a new baby involves many changes, physically, mentally, emotionally, and in your relationships. It is probably one of the most stressful life events you will encounter.

Instead of preparing parents, society sometimes sends the message that “Parenthood is bliss.” This leaves many new parents feeling disappointed, frustrated, and discouraged. They wonder if their transition experience is normal.

About 85% of new birthing parents go through normal postpartum adjustment. **It can include:**

1. The baby blues
2. Normal postpartum adjustment reaction, sometimes called “normal crazy”
3. Postpartum exhaustion

Because having a new baby is a stressful time of life, most parents/ couples will experience normal ups and downs for the first few months after delivery. Remember that your emotional health affects your infant’s social-emotional and cognitive development. This means the smoother your adjustment, the fewer problems your child will have.

If you have trouble coping in the weeks following your baby’s birth, seek help. Parents who have trouble coping during the early postpartum stage may develop depression and anxiety later. If this happens to you, it could have lasting effects on your child’s development.

## How to help yourself and your baby

Caring for a newborn is a 24/7 job! Experts agree that self-care is key to your emotional health. **It also helps you have the physical and emotional energy to be a good parent.**

1. **Nurture yourself.** Eat at regular times, sleep when you can, and exercise.
2. **Keep expectations realistic.** Lower your standards for housework and meals. Let go of your to-do list for a few weeks.

## Normal postpartum adjustment responses

You may feel any of these, or a combination of more than one. Remember that these are normal—but if you are worried about how hard the adjustment has been for you, talk to your health care provider. Severe adjustment now can signal future problems with depression.

### > Baby blues

Tearfulness, sleeplessness, exhaustion, and irritability in the first two to three days after the birth of a baby. It can happen to 80 percent of all new birthing parents and lasts a week or two.

### > Normal adjustment

Distress felt by parents going through “normal adjustment.” It is sometimes called “normal crazy.” Your feelings are normal—having a baby is tiring! Ignore media images of the perfect, blissful parent. This can last a couple of months.

### > Postpartum exhaustion

Being overwhelmed and bone tired from lack of sleep or interrupted sleep. Instead of resting, you are busy meeting others’ needs. When your baby begins to follow a regular sleep schedule (usually several weeks), you will get more rest and recover.

3. **Combat guilt.** Focus on what you have accomplished.
4. **Take breaks**—you deserve it! Start with a half hour each day (15 minutes at a time) and go from there.
5. **Build your support system.** Meet other new parents. Find someone you can talk to about what you're going through. Their role is to listen and provide a shoulder to lean on. Share your fears, doubts, and concerns.
6. **Ask for help.** Having a cleaning crew made up of family or friends can make you feel wonderful! Be direct about what you want your helpers to do. Schedule this for Saturday if necessary.
7. **Befriend yourself.** Recognize that parenthood is a very demanding job. Accept positive and negative feelings as part of the journey.
8. **Remember that parenthood is a learning process. Be patient.** You may make mistakes. Just like any new skill, it takes time to learn what works best for you and your baby.



## Take time to think about your postpartum experience.

What is challenging about caring for your new baby?

Who has helped you during this time? Who have you talked to about your feelings?

Who can help in the future? Who can you talk to about your feelings?