

On Your Marks, Get Set, Go: Getting ready for the birth of your baby

You're getting ready for the Big Day – the one you've been anticipating from the moment you found out you were pregnant. As the time draws near, you begin to anticipate both the good and difficult things ahead of you. It's a time of mixed emotions for all parents to be.

Here are some things it might be helpful to consider:

- ▶ You may be fearful about the weeks and months ahead; anxious about the birth itself and about becoming a parent. Talk to people about how you feel. A parent to be might want to talk about any financial worries related to having a new mouth to feed, or about the loss of independence when the baby's born. Don't bottle everything up and become overwhelmed by it all – share it.
- ▶ Depending on your own upbringing, you may have specific worries about whether you'll be any good as a parent. It's very important to share these fears, perhaps with your partner or with trusted friends, before your baby is born. Remember it's not unusual to have these emotions – even those who have been brought up in a happy home have them to some extent.
- ▶ Make use of the 'free' time you have before the birth. Spend time talking and enjoying being with friends, family, partners, and go out as much as possible while you don't need to arrange a babysitter! Even go on holiday, so long as it's not too near the birth. It might be your last for a while! It's better to use your time to cement your close relationships, rather than tiring yourself out preparing a beautiful nursery – especially as your baby will most likely be sleeping in your room for the first few weeks.
- ▶ Fathers will need to help their partner more as the pregnancy advances to its eighth and ninth month, and the bump gets bigger. If it's difficult to identify ways your partner needs help, ask her! It's likely that the help that she will need will be practical, but she'll need emotional support too.
- ▶ Mothers – don't be annoyed if your partner or others around you don't seem to notice what you need. Often, people are willing to help, but don't always find it easy to know what kind of help would be most appreciated. So, if people are keen to support you, give them some tactful hints about the kind of help you actually need!
- ▶ Lone parents – plan ahead with your close friends, so that you know who will be available to support you, particularly just before and just after the birth.

► Prepare for a more stress-free homecoming with the baby by planning in advance. Use these last weeks to discuss what's going to happen when you get home. Is the baby's new Grandma going to come to stay so she can help you – and if there are two Grandmas, then which one? You may decide you'd like to be alone for the first two weeks, particularly if your partner is taking leave. This sounds like a wonderful idea before the birth – but what you won't realise is that you're going to be astounded by the huge amount of work involved afterwards, and you're going to need practical help.

► Be aware that your relationships are likely to change once you have a baby to look after. Try to talk about this in advance with those who will be affected, as it's possible that jealousy and resentment will rear their ugly heads. Again, this is quite natural. Talking about things in advance will help you as you go through all these new experiences.

► One of the most important things to decide about the birth is who is going to be there in addition to the medical team to support you: your husband/partner/friend/mother/ sister are all possibilities! It's important to do what seems best for you, but also to be aware that a partner or close friend who you would like to be there feels uncomfortable assuming that role. If that is the case, it's probably best not to pressurise them. Try and work things out in way that feels right to both of you.

And after the Big Day? Pregnant women often view the end of their pregnancy as a time of completion, as an ending - 'phew – it's all over!'. But it's not the end - it's the beginning! It's the day you start your new life together as a family. Don't expect to be perfect – just do the best you can, as all parents do. Be prepared to 'learn on the job', be kind to each other – and enjoy!