

# Tips for *New* Moms

By Pam Knepper

Yes, it's amazing how one little baby can profoundly change a woman's life. Though society typically associates motherhood with a permanent rosy glow, in reality the task of caring for a child combines great joy with self-doubt, loads of laundry and not enough sleep. For first-time mothers, the whole experience can feel overwhelming.

"I was 31 years old when I became a mother," says Karin Grutzner, a Club member and mother to 3-month-old Mason. "Until then I'd had a pretty successful life—great job, wonderful husband. My life was frivolous, carefree and I was in control of my life. Then I had a baby. And everything changed."

Here are some tips that will help new moms get a good start and better cope with this major transition called motherhood.

# 1 Take Care of YOURSELF

How do you expect to take care of a new baby, if you don't take care of yourself?

"Women have a tendency to put everyone else before themselves and this is particularly true of mothers," says Dr. Pamela Jordan, associate professor of family and child nursing at the University of Washington. "Mothers need to learn to take care of themselves first or they will burn out quickly."

Ann Douglas, author of "The Unofficial Guide to Having a Baby," agrees.

"If you're giving everything to the baby and you don't take any time to nurture yourself, then you really will feel that all you can do is give, give, give, and nobody's giving back to you," says Ann. "That can make for a very exhausting, frustrating and depressing experience. Motherhood is tough enough as it is."

Dr. Jordan recommends that new moms think of two or three things they could do in less than an hour every day to nurture themselves.

"Take a hot bath, read, take a walk with a friend, listen to music or meditate, says Dr. Jordan. "These activities are good to do on a regular basis, but are especially important for new moms who need to do things that are just for them."

Along with recharging their batteries, new mothers need to avoid falling into poor eating habits once their baby arrives. This can be accomplished by stocking up on healthy foods that can be eaten on the run. Boil a dozen eggs, cut up cubes of cheese, buy fruit you can eat with one hand.

To ensure she is eating properly, Karin participates in cooking sessions at Cuizam in Kirkland. People come to Cuizam on a designated day and make meals that can be frozen for themselves and their families.

"This has been a godsend for me and my family," says Karin. "If I am busy with the baby, then all my husband has to do when he comes home from work is take a meal out of the freezer and put it in the oven. There is no work and I know we are getting a delicious, healthy dinner."



# 2 Take Care of Your

The birth of a baby begins a new era in your life and with it comes significant changes in your responsibilities and your relationship. Even if your marriage is strong before children arrive, the challenges of adjusting to a new baby can add stress and tension in your relationship.

"It is extremely important you love your partner and nurture that relationship once a new baby arrives in the house," says Dr. Jordan. "If not, your relationship will struggle to survive."

Claudia and David Arp, authors of "No Time for Sex: Finding the Time You Need for Getting the Love You Want" and "10 Great Dates to Energize Your Marriage," point out that most parents focus so much on their new baby's needs that they ignore their own needs and their marriage suffers.

"When our first baby was born, we kept waiting for life to return to normal. It never did. We waited for our love life to reignite, but instead our six-pound bundle of joy dynamited it. We waited for time to talk, time to sleep, time to take a shower. Nothing was working out like we thought it would," says Claudia.

The Arps claim they tried to convince themselves things would change. In the end, things did change, but not the way they had anticipated.

"We went from being tired to being sleep-deprived; from being civil to each other to being short-tempered; from being competent adults to being insecure and needy. So in the

# 3 Make SLEEP a Priority

First and foremost, a newborn typically changes a mother's sleeping patterns. Many women experience sleep deprivation during the first year of motherhood and are overwhelmed by the task of caring for another human being 24 hours a day.

According to Amy Einhorn, author of "The Fourth Trimester," human beings were not made to get by on only two hours of uninterrupted sleep at a time. "When Helen Hunt and Paul Reiser had a baby in the TV show "Mad About You", she turned to him and said, 'Remember all those times before we had a baby when I said I was tired? I lied.' I didn't know what the word 'tired' meant before I became a new mom."

Dr. Jordan claims there has never been a new mother that hasn't been exhausted. "It is extremely important that new mothers get their rest. Moms should rest whenever their baby is asleep or being cared for by someone else. Rest can sometimes feel like a waste of time when there is so much

# RELATIONSHIP

middle of new-baby stress, we had to look for ways to keep intimacy alive,” says David. “Sometimes just cuddling and going to sleep in each other’s arms was just what we needed. We also had to give each other a lot of grace.”

Dr. Jordan says in addition to cuddling and giving each other grace, it is imperative that couples get in the habit of scheduling a standing date night.

“If you want the dates to happen you need to write them down on the calendar and treat them like you would any other event in your life,” says Dr. Jordan. “If you don’t, then they won’t happen and you will continue to miss opportunities to be together as a couple. You need that time to talk, have fun and to have intimacy. By scheduling a regular date, these things stay as priorities in your life.”

New mother Karin Grutzner agrees. “My husband and I are now just getting back to scheduling date nights for ourselves. We are finding it so important to have that special time together, so we can focus all our attention on each other rather than totally on our son.”

Dr. Jordan also suggests holding a weekly “business meeting” to discuss household chores, so couples don’t spend their “dates” talking about problems with the water heater or the phone bill.

The Arps recommend couples find some time to talk about “us.”

“It’s easy to be consumed with talk about the baby, but it’s also important to talk about you and about your love life,” says David. “Set aside times when the topic of conversation is your relationship. Affirm the positive aspects and commit to work on areas that need improvement. Share your feelings. Look for ways to affirm your spouse and keep affirming each other.”



to do, but keeping yourself as refreshed as possible will make everything else easier, plus it is paramount to a healthy recovery after delivery.”

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## ASK For & ACCEPT the Help You Need

Since most women are conditioned to give to others, often they have difficulty asking others to help them. But since a new baby is so overwhelming, it’s important to have a support network to assist with hands-on activities as well as emotional issues.

“This is a time in your life when you owe it to yourself to call in every favor you’ve banked over the years,” says Ann Douglas. “If people ask what they can do to help, don’t just brush them off and say you’re getting along okay.”

Simple chores can seem impossible when you’re fatigued and caring for a newborn 24 hours a day.

“It’s just so demoralizing if you look around and your whole kitchen is trashed, and you know that you won’t even have a spare minute to wash a teacup,” says Ann.

Many people around you might be interested in helping, but may not know how or what to offer. Help them out by making a list of concrete things they can do for you. For example, fold a load of baby laundry; drop off a homemade casserole; give your house a quick vacuum; pick up items from the drugstore.

By allowing yourself to ask for and receive help, you will be giving others the gift of feeling included and helpful, as well as giving yourself the gift of help.

# SET Limits

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The last thing you need right now is an onslaught of phone calls and visitors. In fact, make time to schedule a “baby moon” when the baby comes home from the hospital, a few days to be alone as a family. After that, invite people over in groups or have a “baby open house” rather than having a never-ending parade of visitors.

“Even though people don’t make any demands on you, it forces you to stay awake if the baby’s asleep,” says Ann Douglas. “It just puts more stress on you at a time when you’re already dealing with quite enough.”

How to deal with the phone calls? Turn off the ringer when you’re sleeping and don’t feel like you have to answer the phone if you’re up to your eyeballs in dirty diapers.

Ann recommends putting baby updates on your answering machine. Or better yet, send e-mail updates to let people know how you and the baby are doing.

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## THE BABY BLUES & Postpartum Depression

The days and weeks immediately following the birth of your baby can be an emotional roller coaster. You can expect to experience wonder, anxiety, elation and, if you are like most new moms, at least a touch of the blues.

Right after the birth of their babies, experts estimate that between 50 and 90 percent of all new mothers experience a bout of depression. So if you’ve found yourself feeling weepy, sad or irritable for no apparent reason, don’t be hard on yourself. You are not alone.

What causes the blues? There are several factors:

- **Hormonal changes:** After a baby is born, the levels of estrogen and progesterone in a mother’s body drop sharply, causing a deficit that can lead to the blues. As hormone levels return to their normal, prepregnancy levels, spirits tend to rise as well.
- **Physical discomfort:** It takes a while to recover from childbirth. Pain from an episiotomy, c-section or adjusting to breast-feeding can make new moms cranky.
- **Sleep deprivation/exhaustion:** When staying up late at night to care for your newborn follows the hard work of childbirth, it’s hard to catch up on your sleep. It doesn’t take long for sleep deprivation to have a negative effect on mood.
- **Psychological discomfort:** For first-time moms, living with a new baby is an unfamiliar and overwhelming experience. The day-to-day realities of caring for your infant may feel anticlimactic or daunting after nine months of being the center of attention. If you’re feeling a little disappointed by the experience, the disappointment might be compounded by a sense of guilt or inadequacy.

For most new mothers, the “baby blues” is caused by a combination of these factors, and most find that the blues



ease as their bodies return to normal and they become more comfortable living with their baby.

If the “blues” linger for more than a week or two, it could mean the beginning of a more serious condition called postpartum depression (PPD). About 10 percent of new mothers suffer from PPD in the first year after giving birth. Symptoms include deep sadness, irritability, apathy, intense anxiety, lack of appetite, inability to sleep, crying spells, irrational behavior and highly impaired concentration and decision-making.

Treatment is available, so if you think you might be suffering from PPD it is important to see your doctor and find out your treatment options. PPD can be successfully treated with medications, therapy or a combination of both.

“Many times new mothers are embarrassed about feeling unhappy during a time when society expects them to be elated. Women need to know that having PPD is not their fault and asking for help is the best thing they can do for themselves and their baby,” says Dr. Jordan.

# 7 Exercise

It's been several weeks since the birth of your baby and you feel ready to start exercising. The following tips will help you safely and effectively include exercise into your postpartum recovery.

- First, check with your doctor. Your body is still delicate in the first six to eight weeks after you give birth. Before you begin exercising, wait until your doctor gives you the green light.
- Easy does it. Your body endured nine months of stretching. It could take just as long to get your body back in shape. The American Council on Exercise (A.C.E.) recommends starting with pelvic floor exercises (sometimes called "Kegels") to help strengthen the pelvic floor.
- Keep a water bottle handy and drink frequently. You need additional fluids when breast-feeding and with exercise. It's also a good idea to have a high protein and carbohydrate snack an hour or so before exercise.



- Make sure your fitness program includes aerobic, strength and flexibility components as well as a warm-up and cool-down.
- Try to spend 20 to 60 minutes three to five days a

week doing some form of aerobic exercise. Activities such as walking, biking, jogging, cross-country skiing and swimming are great ways to get into shape. Choose an exercise that you enjoy and can be included in your schedule.

The Bellevue Club offers two gentle water exercise classes that are ideal for the new mom just getting back into exercise. AquaFit, held Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 9 to 10 a.m., is a low-impact, shallow-water exercise class that focuses on building muscle strength and burning calories. Deep-Water Challenge is a unique deep-water exercise class that builds strength and endurance, increases muscle tone and burns calories. Held on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 8 to 8:45 a.m. and Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 to 9:45 a.m., the class uses flotation belts or leg cuffs and resistance equipment to give a great total body workout.

- Listen to your body and slow down or rest when you feel out of breath or uncomfortable. Increasing your exercise time and intensity too quickly may increase the possibility of an injury.
- Find a personal trainer. The personalized attention you receive can be key to getting back in shape. "I challenge someone more than she would on her own by motivating and guiding her to do different exercises and teaching her proper form and technique," says Debbie Smith, a Bellevue Club personal trainer. "Depending on the person's fitness level, I design different programs to fit the individual."

- Buy an exercise DVD. This can be an inexpensive and a convenient way to get back in shape.

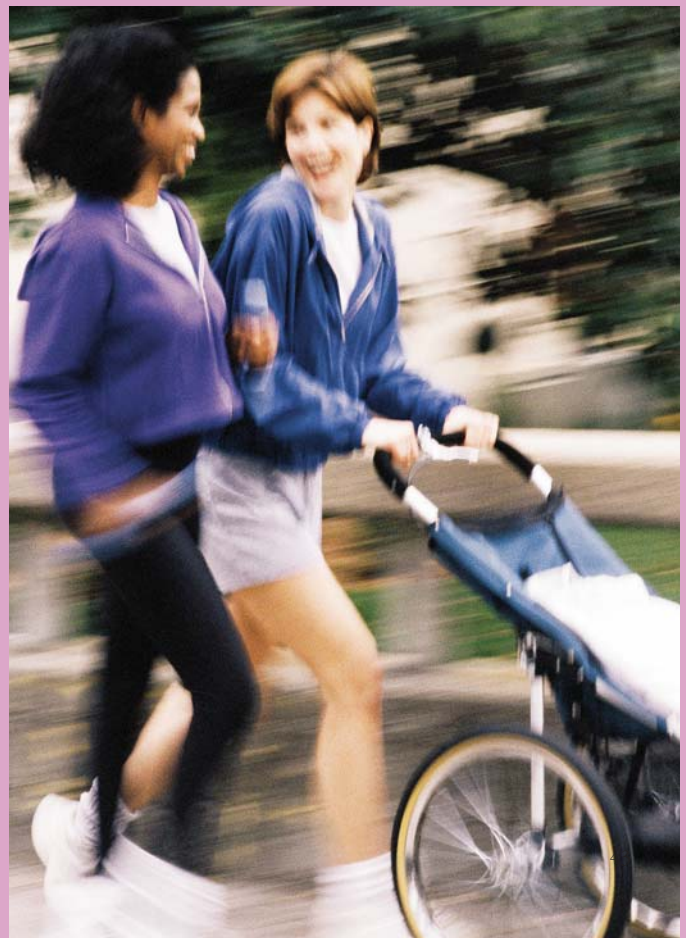
- Maintain perspective. Even if your pregnancy weight is slow to come off, remember why it's there in the first place. "What your stomach looks like doesn't seem very important when you are looking at your perfect little child," says Karin.

If you need someone to

watch your baby while you work out, the Club's Child Care Center is open Mondays through Fridays from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.; Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 4 to 7 p.m.; and Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. The center offers infant care by reservation for a maximum of one hour, and short-term care (no more than two hours) for children ages 6 months to 6 years. The cost is \$6 per hour per child.



*The Club's Child Care Center gives moms the chance to work out while their little ones (birth to 6 years) play. Back, l-r: Tyler Corrington & Jack Craig; front, l-r: Zach Giannopoulos & Megan Heed.*



# Let Your Partner

## 8 PARENT

Remember, the two of you are in this parenting thing together, so work as a team. Don't cut your partner out of child care responsibilities.

"Some women have a real territorial thing where the baby is concerned," explains Ann Douglas. "Dad will put the diaper on, and mom will re-diaper the baby because he hasn't put it on properly. This can really undercut the father's confidence and willingness to help."

Let Dad work out his own relationship with the baby and do things his way. In the end, everyone will be better off for it and much happier.



## Fun For Moms & BABIES

The Bellevue Club offers the following two classes for new mothers and their babies to enjoy together:

### WATER BABIES

Tuesdays, Thursdays & Saturdays  
10-10:30 a.m.

This class puts infants 6 months and older in the water with their parents, providing a basic introduction to the aquatic environment. It includes water-safety awareness, supported movement and floating and basic propulsion skills.



### KINDERMUSIK VILLAGE

Thursdays  
9:30-10:15 a.m.

For ages newborn to 18 months and parent(s). Enjoy 15 weeks of music guaranteed to bring smiles. Each class includes singing and listening, movement, rocking and bouncing and object and instrument play and will focus on the infant/parent enjoyment of music together.

## HELPFUL PUBLICATIONS

"Fourth Trimester: And You Thought Labor Was Hard ... Advice, Humor and Inspiration for New Moms on Surviving the First Six Weeks and Beyond"

By Amy Einhorn  
2001  
Crown Publishing

"The Unofficial Guide to Having a Baby"

By Ann Douglas & John Sussman, M.D.  
1999  
Wiley, John & Sons, Inc.

"No Time for Sex: Finding the Time You Need for Getting the Love You Want"

By David and Claudia Arp  
2004  
Howard Publishing Company

"10 Great Dates to Energize Your Marriage"

By David and Claudia Arp  
1997  
Zondervan Publishing House

"Northwest Baby and Child"  
425-432-3186  
www.nwbaby.com

Monthly Northwest resource dedicated to the needs of expectant and new parents.

"Northwest Parent Publishing"  
206-441-0191  
www.nwparent.com

Publishes "Seattle's Child" and "Eastside Parent," monthly magazines for parents.

"ParentMap"  
206-709-9026  
www.parentmap.com

Monthly news magazine and online resource for Seattle and Eastside parents.

# 9 Get Together with OTHER NEW MOMS

One of the hardest things about being a new mother is believing you are the only one feeling overwhelmed and confused. It can be very supportive to spend time with other new mothers.

"I joined an early-parent support program and it has been wonderful," says Karin. "It has been fun and extremely supportive to talk with other moms about what they are going through with their babies."

Find a new-mom support group, call someone from your prenatal classes, or go to a park and strike up a conversation with another mom.

"You really need to push yourself to connect with others," urges Ann Douglas. "On a day where you have a

baby with an ear infection who's screaming constantly, it really helps to talk to somebody else who's gone through it and lived."

(For a complete list of new mother support or activity groups, please see the section below on Local Resources for New Moms.)



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## Have a Sense of HUMOR

And when all else fails: experts advise simply learn to laugh.

As a new mom, by now you know that the most important thing isn't what the experts say or what people think of you. Being a new mother isn't about any of that. Rather it's about when you and your baby are up at 3 a.m. and you're holding her until she goes to sleep and it is just the two of you. That is what being a mom is all about.



## Local Resources for NEW Moms

### Beyond the Baby Blues

425-450-0332  
www.communitybirth.org

Support for women and families during pregnancy and early parenting years.

### Catholic Community Services

425-643-1937 (Bellevue)  
206-328-5774 (Seattle)  
www.ccsww.org

Pregnancy counseling, parenting classes, adoption and family counseling.

### Child Care Resources

425-865-9350 (Bellevue)  
206-329-5544 (Seattle)  
www.childcare.org

Referrals for state-licensed homes/centers.

### Community Birth & Family Center

206-720-0511  
www.communitybirth.org

Classes and workshops focusing on pregnancy, childbirth, parenting and postpartum depression.

### Depression after Delivery

206-283-9278  
www.charityadvantage.com/depressionafterdelivery/supportgroups.asp

Provides phone support, referral and a free group for women experiencing postpartum depression.

### Great Starts Birth & Family Education

206-789-0883  
www.greatstarts.org

Offers classes in childbirth education and early parenting.

### Lake Washington Technical College

425-739-8100  
www.lwvtc.ctc.edu/future/programs/list/parented.htm

Offers parent education programs, co-ops and toddler programs.

### Listening Mothers

425-450-0332  
www.family-services.org/NewParents/ListeningMothers.htm

A small-group program offered for new mothers and babies.

### Postpartum Support International of Washington

1-888-404-7763  
www.ppmdsupport.com

Provides personal support to women with postpartum depression and their families.

### Program for Early-Parent Support (PEPS)

206-547-8570, ext. 10  
www.pepsgroup.org

PEPS is a nonprofit organization that brings parents of young children together in community-based discussions and support groups. For parents of children birth to 3.

### Washington Moms Club

425-413-2073  
www.momsclub.org/links.html#Washington

Weekly meetings and social activities for mothers with children birth to 5 years of age.