

LEARNING MADE EASY



Dad's Guide to Baby's First Year

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



Prepare for and look
after a baby

Support your partner through
pregnancy, birth, and beyond

Help your child grow
and develop

Sharon Perkins, RN
Stefan Korn
Scott Lancaster
Eric Mooij

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**by Sharon Perkins, RN,
Stefan Korn,
Scott Lancaster, and
Eric Mooij**

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Introduction

Welcome to the wonderful, wacky, and yes, sometimes scary, world of dadhood! Being a dad starts before you ever see your baby's face and doesn't end until . . . well, it never actually ends.

This book starts at the very beginning and assumes you want to know what's going to happen for the next few years, at least. After all, once you've been a dad for a few years, what more is there to learn? Plenty, of course, but we don't want to overwhelm you, so we concentrate on the first 7 or 8 years.

We wrote this book because we either love being a dad (three of us) or we love the dads in our own lives (the other one of us). We want to see dads succeed, because a good dad can have a huge impact on a little one's life. We also want you to have fun being a dad, because there's more to being a dad than worrying about potty training, good schools, and whether or not your kiddo is good at sports.

Being a dad is an adventure, and we're happy to accompany you through the first few years.

About This Book

One of the best things about a *For Dummies* book is that we assume you're interested in knowing what you really need to know, without a lot of extra stuff thrown in. But because some guys really do want more detail, we include some extra info in the sidebars, which are shaded boxes. Feel free to read these if you want to dig a little deeper or to skip them if you want just the facts for now.

Keep in mind that this book is a reference book, so you don't have to read this book in order (unless you want to!); just use the table of contents and the index to help you find what you're looking for. You can dip into and out of chapters as you like.

Within this book, you may note that some web addresses break across two lines of text. If you're reading this book in print and want to visit one of these web pages, simply key in the web address exactly as it's noted in the text, pretending as though the line break doesn't exist. If you're reading this as an e-book, you've got it easy — just click the web address to be taken directly to the web page.

Foolish Assumptions

If you're reading this book, we assume you're either a dad, going to be a dad, or want to be a dad in the future. That doesn't mean that moms can't read this book — you can, because there's lots of information here that applies to both parents. If you're a grandparent, this book may help you keep up with what's new in the world of parenting (stop rolling your eyes, we can see you!). If you want more detail about the pregnancy months, pick up a copy of *Dad's Guide to Pregnancy For Dummies*, by Matthew M.F. Miller and Sharon Perkins, RN (Wiley).

Icons Used in This Book

Icons point you to certain types of information. In this book, we use the following icons:



TIP

Tips include information that may help you be a better dad or partner.



REMEMBER

This icon points out information we consider absolutely necessary for good dads to know.



WARNING

This icon gives you information that can keep you from making a really big mistake in the dad game.

Beyond the Book

No book can cover everything there is to know on a topic. For that reason — and because you may not want to carry this book with you everywhere — we’ve created an online source you can turn to for some quick bites of essential information. To get this Cheat Sheet, simply go to www.dummies.com and search for “Dad’s Guide to Baby’s First Year For Dummies Cheat Sheet” in the Search box.

The Cheat Sheet for this book includes such valuable information as a step-by-step guide to changing a diaper — dads aren’t born knowing this stuff, after all — some suggestions on soothing a crying baby, and best of all, ideas on how to have fun with your baby and toddler.

Where to Go from Here

While being a dad starts at the beginning and moves forward year by year, you don’t have to approach this book that way. You might be in the throes of choosing a school right now and have very little interest in reading about potty training. That’s fine — start with whichever chapter interests you at the moment. If you’re a straight-through type of guy, feel free to start with page 1 and keep going. But for everyone else, skipping ahead to the sections that address your immediate concerns is just fine.



**From Here
to Paternity:
Conception
to Birth**

IN THIS PART . . .

Discover how to adjust to the news — you're going to be a dad!

Get tips on living with your pregnant partner.

Find out all about your unborn baby.

Figure out what you need to buy for your newborn.

Get through the birth day without breaking too much of a sweat.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Being a dad — you're in good company

Considering the biggest decision of your life

Exploring dadhood

Understanding what it takes to be a great dad

Knowing where to go for guidance

Chapter 1

Fatherhood

Right now, somewhere across the globe, someone is becoming a father. He may be suited up in scrubs as his child is delivered by cesarean in a high-tech delivery suite, or holding his partner's hand as she gives birth in a pool at home. He may be pacing at the neighbors' hut in a village somewhere in the third world as his wife gives birth surrounded only by women, or heading through rush-hour traffic to get to the hospital on time. Wherever these dads-to-be are, they all have one thing in common. When they lay eyes on their new little baby, they know life will never be the same.

There's something about becoming a father that's universal. For ages, you've been just yourself: Building a career, buying a house, perhaps traveling and seeing the world. You've concentrated on becoming a person in your own right — an individual. You've had wild days and adventures; you've been places. Those are all great things to do with your life. But when you have a child, you begin a whole new adventure — one that doesn't end when your visa runs out or the bar closes. Your new adventure is lifelong. Being a father makes you think of your own father and all the fathers who came before him, and you realize you're something bigger

than just a stamped passport and some good stories around the campfire — you're a bona fide member of the human race, a piece in a puzzle that has been put together over many generations. And there's a part of you that will go on into the next generation, and then hopefully the next and the next.

In this chapter, we explore what it means to be a father and talk about the reality of being a dad. The role of fathers has changed a lot in just the generation between our fathers and us. Dads are more involved, but they also have a lot more stress — work commitments, financial pressure, separation from partners, and information overload. But fear not — in this chapter and in the rest of this book, we keep fatherhood real with practical information, useful explanations, and a bit of humor. After all, children are lots and lots of fun, so why make the journey to fatherhood more serious than it needs to be?

Dispelling Common Myths about Fatherhood

Toward the end of the 20th century, we experienced a revival of fatherhood and the dawn of a new generation of dads — a generation of dads who are no longer content playing a supporting role in the upbringing of their children. Dads want to experience parenting fully, warts and all. Some brave dads are even taking over and sending mom back to the workforce. The number of stay-at-home dads is increasing year by year in most Western societies, a clear sign that something fundamental is changing about how we bring up our children and organize our lives. (If you're thinking about becoming a stay-at-home dad, we have lots of advice and practical tips for taking on your new role in Chapter 16.)

However, despite the generation of new dads, many dads are still faced with a few persistent stereotypes:

» **Fathers are completely useless when it comes to looking after babies and children.** That's nonsense. Yes, dads parent differently from moms, but male ways of doing things are just

as valid and important. Research shows that fathers are just as good as mothers at caring for babies, responding to their needs and temperaments, and learning how to read babies' cues. Research also shows that children with involved dads do better in school and are more confident and independent later in life. Unfortunately, fathers have effectively been cut off from getting involved through preconceived ideas about parenting, peer pressure, or the demands of the modern workplace. The good news is most dads in the 21st century now have the option to do it differently and show the world that dads make fantastic caregivers.

- » **Fathers don't have to do any of the day-to-day care that babies and children require.** This may be true if you want to remain in the dark ages of fatherhood. Twenty-first century dads do caregiving because there's an important reason for it: The best way to bond with your newborn child is by taking part in all that day-to-day stuff. Changing a diaper, trimming his nails, and tucking him into bed each night aren't just jobs that need to be done; they're a way for your baby and children to spend a bit of time with you and get to know you. Your child will learn that when he needs something, you're there to take care of him, make him feel better, and comfort him when he's ill or teething, or just because he needs a hug. He'll learn words from you as you chat to him while he's in the bath, learn how to put clothes on from the way you dress him each morning, and learn all sorts of other good qualities simply from the way you are. You also brighten up his world no end with all the silly things you do.
- » **Moms laugh at dads when they're out with babies by themselves.** Maybe — but mostly because they probably find you really cute with your little one strapped to your chest! In most cases, women will flock from all corners of the room when you walk into that playgroup with baby on your shoulder. If you get the occasional overly "helpful" mom in the supermarket who doesn't think you quite know how to handle a crying baby, be confident that you can demonstrate who's daddy by settling your little one in one minute flat.
- » **Fathers don't have a social life.** Wrong — fathers (and all parents) have a different social life. You may have to invest a bit of time and thought into how you'll manage going out or

taking part in sports. But these things can all be organized. After all, dads are fantastic at organizing. It takes a while getting used to having an extra person in your life, but that doesn't mean you'll never be able to go out again. Chapter 8 provides hints and tips for getting out and about, with and without your little one.

- » **As a dad you don't have a sex life anymore.** Actually that one is kind of true, but only temporarily. The birthing experience, sheer exhaustion, and practicalities of looking after a newborn can make it somewhat tricky to get back to your pre-baby sex life with your partner. The word here is patience. Your sex life will return (check out Chapters 6 and 8 for more on this subject). But you may just have to be a bit more creative now that your little one is in the house.

The pros and cons of fatherhood

As with every life decision or change, there are good things and challenges. If you want to take a rational approach to fatherhood, consider the following.

On the plus side:

- » Fathers report their lives are more meaningful than before they had a child.
- » Fatherhood can make you a more compassionate, mature, and confident person.
- » You get to be a child all over again (yes, you get to play with cool toys and teach your child lots of silly tricks).
- » Being a father is a chance for you to hand down skills and values from your family. This will feel very good when you're nearing your final days.
- » You'll probably for the first time in your life truly understand your own father.
- » You get a real kick out of raising a child well and seeing her achieve lots of things.