

The Ultimate Postpartum Guide

TIDBITS FOR SURVIVING AND THRIVING IN
THE FIRST 6 MONTHS OF MOTHERHOOD



MOPS.ORG

If you are reading this after you've had your baby, you are most likely exhausted. So we'll get straight to the point. The first six months of parenting is seriously difficult. Basically, it's like starting a new job where you're suddenly the CEO with no proper training or experience and entering into a sick sort of sleep-deprivation study, all at the same time.

But on the flip side, it's also one of the most unbelievably sweet seasons of parenting. But we've got to get you rested and nourished, so you can make the most of this beautiful, short (yet seemingly endless) time.

Sleep

Yes, the first and likely most important thing is to help you get rested ... OK, not as rested as you were when you were allowed to sleep a crazy eight hours in a row, but hopefully we'll get you to the point where you aren't feeling like the walking dead.

ASK FOR HELP

When you think of the early cave women, do you think they had a baby and then went to live in their own cave and faced the sleep deprivation, loneliness and anxiety all on their own? We doubt it. First of all, we think it'd be pretty hard to find a cave built just for one. Secondly, these women understood that survival actually *depended* on community. They knew the best way to nourish and protect their children was to ask for help and offer help continually throughout the motherhood journey.

So who can you ask for help? We know many of us don't have grandparents available to help, so we may need to stretch ourselves a bit by asking friends. But here's the amazing part: When you ask another mom for help, it actually frees her up to ask you for help when she needs it. Plus, it moves your friendship to the next level of trust. And who doesn't benefit from having closer friendships?

Here's one idea that will likely be a win-win for you and another mom. You can offer to watch her child two times a week, and she could watch yours two times a week. Just a two-hour break twice a week can help enormously, and it's also fun to give your baby some playtime!

Now you may feel tempted to work or "be productive" during this time, but we implore you to remember how essential sleep is and find a way to nap or at least rest. It's not lazy ... it's smart.

SLEEP WHEN THE BABY SLEEPS

Again, getting sleep (even in tiny, 30-minute chunks) will make even the most overwhelming days seem less daunting and more do-able. So, follow the advice of women throughout the ages ... sleep when the baby sleeps. Almost everything else can wait.

HELP THE BABY SLEEP WELL

Every baby truly is unique, which adds to the “fun” of trying to figure out what a baby needs, but here are four ideas that might help your baby sleep better:

1. Sleep begets sleep. I know this defies common sense, but keeping your baby up will generally just make her overtired, which will actually make it harder for her to fall asleep and sleep deeply. You can learn a lot about the importance of sleep in “[Healthy Sleep Habits, Happy Child](#)” by Dr. Marc Weissbluth.
2. Keep your baby on a routine. We are not talking about a strict adherence to the time on a clock here. Rather, try and keep your baby on a rhythm of Eat, Activity, Sleep and You (E.A.S.Y.), which was designed by Tracy Hogg, author of “[Secrets of the Baby Whisperer](#).”

Eat - You feed your baby for about 30-40 minutes,

Activity - You give him some activity, like tummy time, for 15-30 minutes,

Sleep - You put him to sleep for an hour or so,

You - During which you also have time to relax or sleep.

By keeping your baby on this routine order of events, it'll be easier to decipher what his cries mean. If he cries a little after eating, he's likely crying because he's tired (assuming he's got a clean diaper and not teething). If he's teething, we're so sorry. You can do this. Just remember it won't last forever!

3. Swaddle, swaddle, swaddle. We have to come clean. Many of us didn't swaddle our first born at first because we were convinced that she knew better than thousands of years of baby-soothing wisdom. You see, many babies act like they hate the swaddle by pushing against it or trying to free themselves. If your baby is doing this and successfully getting out of her swaddle, it is likely you are using a poor swaddling technique.

Don't tell the nurses at the hospital, but their blankets are way too small to properly swaddle your baby. The best swaddle will make your baby feel as secure as she felt in the womb, which is why it helps babies calm down and sleep, thank God. IMHO, the best technique for swaddling is featured in Dr. Harvey Karp's book, “[The Happiest Baby on the Block](#).” He even includes the ideal size of your blanket – which is key – and many other time-tested ways to soothe your baby.

4. Parenting is definitely not a one-size-fits-all type of thing. Regarding sleeping, your baby could sleep in a crib or in bed with you ([co-sleeping](#)). There are also bassinets that can be placed right alongside your bed. Most importantly, consider sleep solutions that best fit you and your baby.



sleep

Your Emotional and Physical Well-Being

We've already covered sleep, which is likely the best thing you can do to help your body recover from the tremendous changes its experiencing, but now we're going to talk about other things that may be affecting your physical wellness and what you can do about it.

HORMONAL IMBALANCE

The term **hormonal imbalance** may sound like not that big of a deal, but the sudden plummeting of your progesterone levels after giving birth creates estrogen dominance, which may cause many symptoms that can actually be a very big deal.

You may experience physical symptoms, such as constipation, sore breasts, urinary or fecal incontinence, hemorrhoids, or our personal nemesis, hot flashes. (Yes, this is a thing that can happen *before* menopause.)

On the emotional end of things, you may experience what is condescendingly called "the baby blues," which actually means you are prone to crying or screaming with barely a moment's warning. In fact, you may not even know why you are crying, and your partner is most likely even further in the dark. But drastically imbalanced hormones and sleep deprivation definitely impact our emotions, so give yourself a break. A *big* break. It'll most likely get better with time. Really.

But, if it's not getting better or if you have *any* thoughts of hurting yourself or your baby, you **MUST** get help at once. It has nothing to do with how strong you are or how much you love your baby. If this happens, it'll simply be a result of crazy, plummeting hormones. But again, do **NOT** try to go at this alone if this happens. Getting help is a sign of bravery. It really is. Here's the **Postpartum Support Hotline** just in case: **1-800-944-4PPD**.

NOURISHMENT

It's very easy to forget to eat and drink when you have an infant. It's hard to fathom, but you can easily spend 100 hours a week feeding your baby, cleaning bottles or pump equipment, changing diapers, or soothing your baby. Shocking, right?

But it's crucial to your well-being that you drink lots and lots of water and eat **nourishing foods**. Some of us lived on chocolate chips cookies the first week, and that didn't turn out well. No surprise, we felt much better when we started eating real food regularly. Maybe add a sticky note to the changing table with: "Did you eat today?" (We're actually not joking ... see previous conversation about sleep deprivation.)

GET OUT OF THE HOUSE

Like I just mentioned, your baby-caring activities may be taking up 14 (or more!) hours of each day and a whopping 100 hours each week. And it's tempting to spend many of these hours in your home because it might just seem easier, and quite frankly, less scary than venturing outside with your new baby. But it's super important to your emotional well-being that you get outside and connect with other human beings (every day). If you don't have new mom friends yet, go to a park even if your baby is too young to play. You'll get a chance to visit with other moms (which will be a win-win for both of you), and your baby will love to watch the big kids play.

Here's another idea: MOPS is a global organization that builds circles of moms who love each other like family. Whether you are a first-time mom, seventh-time mom, adoptive mom, foster mom, stepmom or any other type of mom, you are welcome at MOPS. Whether you prefer to meet with other moms in a coffee shop, church, park, living room or video chat, MOPS has something for you. Learn more about what's available **in your area** or **start your own group!**

By reaching out and getting to know other moms, you might be an answer to another mom's prayers. Parenting can be a lonely job. Doing motherhood together is just *way* more fun.

IF YOU'RE BREASTFEEDING

If you choose to breastfeed your baby (and please, please, please do not feel pressured to if you don't feel it's right for you and your baby), here are some strategies to help you and your baby latch onto this new activity, pun intended.

Find a lactation consultant. It seems, breastfeeding does not come as naturally to humans as it does to animals. Therefore, we highly recommend you find an experienced and gifted lactation consultant. Some of us have met with upwards of five consultants before realizing the roof of our baby's mouth was exceptionally high or something else was complicating the learning process. We share this not to pressure or scare you, but rather to say that it is very typical for a new mom and baby to need the help of an expert. Maybe five experts.

Nipple cream will be your best friend. Bring **nipple cream** with you to the hospital. Use it before you need it, and use it often, like every feeding. (Same goes for diaper ointment by the way.)

If you pump, don't skimp on a cheap pump. Save yourself a lot of pain and suffering. Buy or rent a quality pump right from the beginning. If you rent, you'll get a fresh pack of tubes and covers, so you won't be re-using any of the parts in contact with your milk or baby. The only part you re-use is the pump mechanism itself. Check to see if your healthcare plan will cover part or all of the pump.

Watch out for plugged ducts and mastitis. If you pump or have times when your baby gets a bottle, it's vital you watch out for plugged breast ducts which may lead to an infection called **mastitis**. The good news is that you can usually unplug your ducts by using warm water and massage, but if you start a fever or feel body aches, call your doctor immediately so you can start antibiotics if you need them.

Drink lots and lots and lots of water. It's recommended to drink a whopping 12 eight-ounce glasses of water per day if you are breastfeeding. Again, it's easy to forget to fit in all this water drinking. Consider setting up a routine such as drinking a glass of water every time you feed your baby. You can even put a sticky note on your favorite nursing chair to remind you.

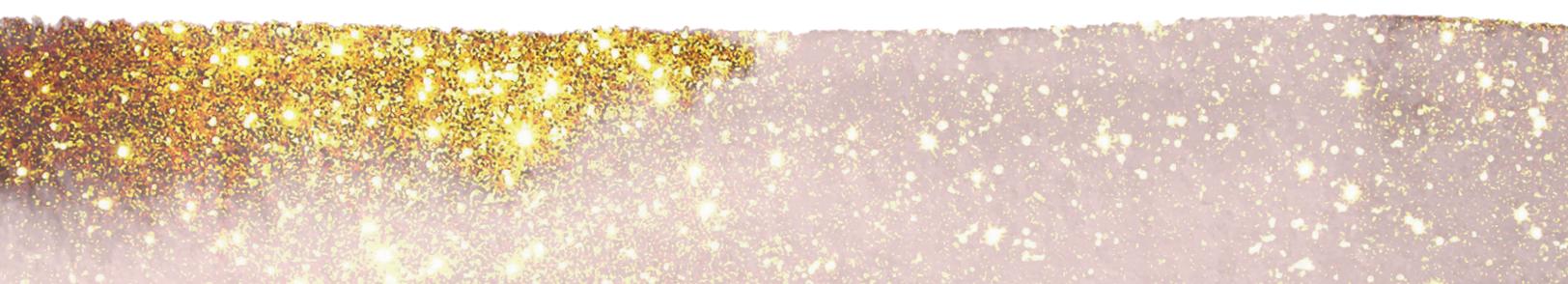
IF YOU'RE BOTTLE FEEDING

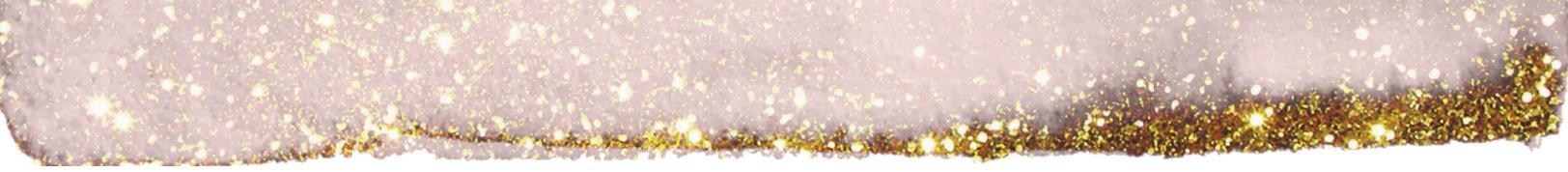
If you decide bottle feeding is the best choice for you and your baby, here are a few ideas that don't suck (again, pun intended).

Get the right size nipple for your baby's age. One thing a new mom may not know is that bottle nipples for newborns actually have a smaller hole than ones built for older babies. Just check out the age listed on the package.

Burp, burp and burp again. We know it's pretty repetitive, but it's best to **burp your baby** every three to five minutes during feeding. You can also reduce her air intake by using an angled bottle or one with disposable liners. No matter what you do, there's a strong likelihood of your baby spitting up. Keep those burp clothes handy to keep your costume changes to a minimum.

Find ways to streamline bottle cleaning. Now is a great time to take a look at inexpensive dish washing gadgets that may be a huge time saver when **cleaning bottles** and nipples. There are small containers that fit in your dishwasher to hold nipples, special bottle cleaning sponges and even bottle cleaning appliances. Rinse out the bottle and nipple soon after your baby's feeding as dried-up milk is definitely a lot harder to clean. You can give bottles a more thorough cleaning with soap and water when you have more time.





LONGEST DAYS, SHORTEST YEARS

Your body just carried, protected and nourished a whole new human. (Amazing, right?!) And it's important you take moments to recognize how incredibly strong, brave and beautiful you are! When moments of doubt creep in, know in your heart that you are truly your kid's best mom.

And we know it's easier said than done, but try to enjoy this crazy, exhausting and gloriously beautiful time with your sweet baby. This season really is filled with the longest days and the shortest years. And believe it or not, you really will treasure this time ... once you can get some sleep.

you've got this,
— *mama* —