

Mental health guide: six tips for new dads



Becoming a father can **trigger a whole range of emotions**, from overwhelming joy to utter fear and everything in between. Whether you're also caring for a post-natal partner, or you've been through an adoption or surrogacy process, **becoming a parent is life-changing**. Throw in lack of sleep, increased financial pressure, and juggling work commitments and no wonder new dads can feel completely overwhelmed.

In fact, about **1 in 10 fathers experience mental health difficulties** such as depression in the first six months after their baby arrives, with first-time and younger dads particularly vulnerable. And, although awareness is growing, dads' wellbeing can sometimes get sidelined. When a baby is born, the focus is rightly on mothers and their baby, but **fathers need support too**.



The struggles that new dads can face

- **Hormonal changes:** Whether you are an adoptive parent, same sex couple or opposite sex couple, research has shown that all parents experience mood changes once a baby arrives.
- **Partner's post-natal depression:** Up to half of dads with partners experiencing post-natal depression show signs of depression as well.
- **Feeling disconnected:** Dads want to be part of the newborn experience, but often they feel as if they're on the 'outside'. Naturally, mums and partners can be so overwhelmed with their new baby that dads may feel overlooked, or even a bit resentful. It might seem that their partner's focus is entirely on the new baby. This may or may not be the case, as new mums or partners can feel consumed by the baby's needs, rather than ignoring their other half.
- **Guilt:** Dads can feel guilty that they can't do more to help their partner, or that they're not feeling as strong a bond with their baby as they imagine their partner to feel.
- **Stress:** Becoming a parent is one of life's most stressful events, and it can be extremely overwhelming for both mothers and fathers.
- **Sleep deprivation:** A lack of sleep can significantly contribute toward developing symptoms of anxiety and depression.

These struggles can manifest as anger, irritability, low motivation, or withdrawing from relationships. Unfortunately many men stay silent, and dads are no exception. This can be **due to stigma**, because they feel they need to focus on their partners and children, or simply because they are **unaware of the support available** to them.

Here are a few tips for new dads to safeguard their resilience, mental health and wellbeing.

Tips for new dads



Go easy on yourself

Being a new parent is hard, so cut yourself some slack. There is no instruction manual on how to be a perfect parent, and while it's good to take advice, **trust your instincts** and recognise that **you will make mistakes**. Parenthood is a lifelong journey so don't expect to have everything solved after two weeks' paternity leave.



Communicate with your partner

Good communication with your partner is an important way to feel calmer and more confident about your parenting, and is especially important in the early stages. Where possible, **plan things, share duties** and give each other **time to rest**. If you are feeling overlooked or overwhelmed, communicate this, so that you can have positive conversations on what you can do next to help each other.



Spend time with your baby

There are lots of ways for dads to form a special bond with their baby. **Skin-to-skin cuddling** is a brilliant way to connect deeply with your newborn and to soothe them when they're tired and grumpy. If possible, try to carve out a **role that's 'yours'** e.g. bathtime or the bedtime routine, and if you can't do this every day then fix set days where the responsibility is yours. Don't be afraid to **be silly with your baby**, as playing and chatting with them (this will be one-sided at first!) are great ways to connect.



Give yourself mental and physical breaks

Try to eat well, exercise and rest as much as possible, all of which will give you **more energy** to help you through this physically draining stage of your life. Mental breaks are equally important, so to **recharge** and maintain a sense of normalcy make sure that you continue engaging in **activities you enjoy**. There's nothing wrong with watching a few hours of TV if it helps you to unwind and relax. Take care of your family by taking care of yourself.



Connect with others

Communicating with your partner is crucial, but it is important to avail yourself of your full **support network** of family and friends too. If you are feeling continually low, don't be afraid to share how you're feeling. It doesn't matter who you talk to, just so long as it's someone you trust and who will listen. It is also very beneficial to chat and relate to **other new dads**, who are in the exact same situation as you.



Be patient

Be patient with yourself, your partner, and your baby as you all adjust to your new roles. Accept that your **daily routine will change** and that it's okay to let some tasks go. It's important to remember that the difficulties of being a new parent (sleep deprivation, less quality time with your partner, less socialising etc.) are **temporary**, and you will return to a more balanced sense of 'normality' once you have settled into your role as a dad. In other words, **it gets easier!**



Remember to check in with yourself

Amongst all the chaos, make sure to **check in with yourself**, mentally. Feeling low or anxious is perfectly natural for new dads, but it's important to recognise when your low mood or anxiety has continued for too long, or when it has become **debilitating** e.g. physical effects like panic attacks or not being able to sleep well, as these symptoms could be signs of depression or anxiety.

Contact **HealthHero** today for more support and advice. We're with you every step of the way.