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Health Resources & Services Administration
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This booklet is available at
www.mchb.hrsa.gov/pregnancyandbeyond
Print copies can be obtained from the HRSA Information Center by
calling 1-888-Ask-HRSA

These tools are part of a series of materials called Bright Futures for Women's Health and Wellness. These materials were developed by the the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau. The aim of the Bright Futures Initiative is to help women of all ages achieve better physical, mental, social, and spiritual health by encouraging healthy practices. More information about the Bright Futures Initiative is available at <http://mchb.hrsa.gov/about/owhbf.htm>



Taking Care of Mom

NURTURING SELF AS WELL AS BABY





FINDING MORE HELP AND INFORMATION

Local Resources

There are many organizations and publications that can help you find more information on how you can prepare for motherhood and take care of yourself. Some can also help you find local groups and other resources in your area. For example, ask your local hospital or faith community if they host groups for new moms.

Web Sites and Resource Phone Numbers

The following Web sites and Resources phone numbers contain reliable information of interest to pregnant women and new mothers:

HRSA Maternal and Child Health Bureau

www.mchb.hrsa.gov/pregnancyandbeyond/
www.hrsa.gov/womenshealth/

HRSA Information Center

<http://ask.hrsa.gov>
1-888-ASK-HRSA (888-275-4772)

National Women's Health Information Center

www.womenshealth.gov/
1-800-994-9662; 1-888-220-5446 TDD

Your State or Local Health Department

1-800-311-BABY (1-800-311-2229)
1-800-504-7081 in Spanish

Online Communities

Some commercial Web sites also offer online chat rooms and bulletin boards for new moms to connect, communicate, and share their experiences.

It may seem like everyone's attention – including yours – is focused on your baby.
But don't forget, **Mom has needs, too!**

Pregnancy and motherhood are times of great change.

Now more than ever, it's important to seek support from others and make time to take care of yourself.

NURTURING YOURSELF AS WELL AS YOUR BABY

A lot of new mothers are so busy taking care of their babies that they forget to take care of themselves. This can lead to stress, exhaustion, and a sense of being overwhelmed.

It's important to take a few minutes each day to nurture yourself and find healthy ways to relax and relieve stress.

Some moms say that meditation, prayer, and relaxation techniques, like deep breathing and positive visualization, give them a short but much-needed break in their daily routine.

Others set aside time for special activities that focus on enhancing their own well-being. Try one of the following:

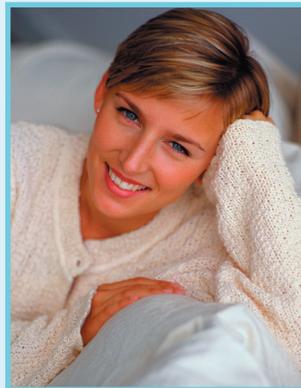
Mommy Break/Mommy Time Out Ask someone you trust to watch the baby while you nap, bathe, read, shop, talk on the phone, anything! Breaks are a necessity, not a luxury.

Moms' Night Set a regular time (weekly, monthly) to meet with other moms – with or without the kids.

Pamper Yourself Get a makeover, a new hair style, a manicure, or a massage. Do something nice for yourself.

Relax, put your feet up, and take at least 30 minutes a day for yourself.

Get yourself a lipstick – something small that reminds you that you're still a woman, not just a mother.



GETTING READY



Pregnancy and motherhood are a natural part of a woman's lifecycle. It is a time full of changes – some expected and some unexpected. These changes affect a woman's body, her emotions, and many other parts of her life – like relationships, work, and finances. Preparing to become a mother involves learning new things – new information, new skills, and new ways of looking at the world – each and every time you become a mother.

Knowing what to expect can help reduce your stress and anxiety and enhance your ability to enjoy the experience.

Learn as much as you can about pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood from books, magazines, Web sites, and educational television shows.

Talk to people you trust, like your own mother, your spouse or partner, your friends and family members, other moms, and especially, your health care providers (doctor, nurse, midwife, nurse practitioner, or nutritionist).

Think positive. Having a positive attitude and realistic expectations lead to more positive experiences during pregnancy and more satisfaction with motherhood.

Don't be afraid to ask for help. This booklet contains advice from other moms and important tips on caring for yourself – and asking others to help you – on your way to becoming a mother.

FINDING OUT WHAT'S TYPICAL AND PREPARING FOR THE UNEXPECTED

Each woman is a unique individual and each pregnancy is a unique experience. This experience is shaped in part by a woman's cultural background, as well as her own life experience. For example, is she married, does she have other children, does she work, does she live far away from her family? Some women (like women over 35, immigrant women, and women who adopt) have special needs that may make becoming a mother even more challenging.



Sometimes it's hard for new mothers to know what to expect, especially if they don't know what other women typically experience.

Talk to your health care provider - she or he will help you determine what's right for you, especially when it concerns the health and well being of you and your baby.

Talk to other moms - knowing that others have had the same experience can be comforting and encouraging.

Prepare for the unexpected - knowing what you will do if things don't go as planned will help you prepare for some of the uncertainty involved in becoming a mother. Talk to your health care providers in advance about how you will work together to successfully cope with relatively common but unexpected events like cesarean section, complications during or after childbirth, difficulty breastfeeding, or emotional distress.

MOTHERHOOD IS NOT ABOUT BEING PERFECT

Many new moms feel overwhelmed and disorganized because they try to "do it all."

Before your baby is born, ask yourself the following:

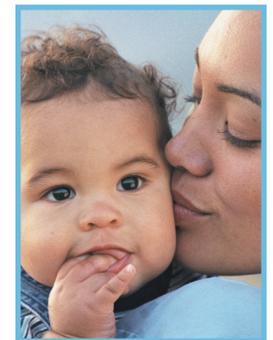
- Who will help me, and how?
- How will the father of my baby be involved?
- How will being a mother affect my job?
- How will being a mother affect my daily life?

Talk to the people who are close to you about your answers. Make sure they know that you will need their help.

Five Tips on Setting Realistic Goals After Your Baby is Born:

1. **Be realistic** - you have even less time now that you have a baby. You don't have to do it all.
2. **Simplify your life** - focus on what is most important to you and cut back on unnecessary activities.
3. **Establish a new routine** - it takes time to find a regular rhythm for everyday tasks with a new baby, even for experienced moms.
4. **Ask for help** - tell loved ones how they can help, and don't be afraid to discuss concerns with your health care provider.
5. **Learn to let go** - trying to do too much doesn't leave enough time for what's really important to you.

Learn to value yourself as a mother and remember – motherhood is not about perfection.



ADJUSTING TO BODY CHANGES

I've learned to separate the anxiety of getting bigger with the experience of being pregnant, and accept that it's just part of being pregnant.

It's undeniable—a woman's body changes when she becomes a mother. You may love your tummy during pregnancy, but learning to accept your new body may take some time. While many new mothers wish they could quickly regain their pre-baby bodies, for most it takes time, good nutrition, and regular exercise.



During pregnancy, talk to your health care provider about setting realistic goals for nutrition, weight gain, and physical activity.

Both during and after pregnancy, moderate exercise (especially walking) is recommended to:

- **Help maintain a healthy weight**
- **Help maintain a positive outlook**
- **Improve your emotional well-being**

Remember, some body changes may be more permanent.

Coming to terms with and accepting these changes is an important step to feeling better about your body and yourself.

NEW FEELINGS ARE OKAY

One minute I'm fine, the next minute I'm crying, the next minute I'm frustrated or angry. I just wasn't prepared for the mood swings.

The emotional roller coaster is a common, typical response to the changes in pregnancy and the increased demands of motherhood. Many women expect pregnancy and motherhood to be a happy time. They are often surprised by unexpected feelings and emotions.

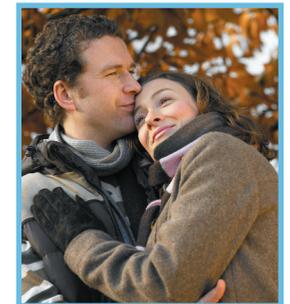
How are you feeling? In the last few weeks, I have been feeling:

Moody	Happy	Exhausted	Overwhelmed
Excited	Frustrated	Supported	Satisfied
Stressed	Loved	Scared	Lonely
Confident	Angry	Joyous	Cheerful
Weepy	Calm	Worried	Guilty

Share your results with someone who cares about you - your mother, a friend, your spouse or partner. Talk to them about how you are feeling and how they can help. Maybe they can help by listening, giving advice, helping with child care or household chores, or just a simple hug.

Share this with your health care provider - nothing is too trivial to discuss with your doctor or nurse. Tell them how you are feeling—they can help, too.

Talking to someone who cares can help you stay positive.



SURROUND YOURSELF WITH PEOPLE WHO CARE AND UNDERSTAND

Every new mother needs people she can count on—people who can help with childcare and housework, people who can give advice and emotional support, and people who will just listen. **Who are the important people in *your* social circle?**



My **girlfriends** and I created a mommy club. We meet once a month and bounce around ideas about what's going on with our bodies, our kids, our husbands, our partners, our jobs—without it I'd lose my head!

BUILD YOUR OWN NETWORK OF MOTHERS:

- Join a local mothers' support group
- Start a mothers' club in your neighborhood
- Organize a monthly mom's night out (or in) with friends
- Invite another mother and her baby to lunch or the park
- Join an online community with chat rooms for mothers
- Meet other moms in everyday places, like daycare, the playground, the grocery store, a cafe, birthing or parenting classes, or the pediatrician's office.



I have the best **doctor**—she's great. She answers all my questions and really puts my mind at ease.

Others who may be helpful include neighbors, employers, co-workers, childcare providers, and members of your faith community.



My **mom** is my support system. I think her advice is the best.

I'm from a tight knit **family**, so everyone is involved. My **sisters** already have kids, so they tell me everything.