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## **The baby-arrival guide**

**7 ways to prepare yourself -- and your home -- for your newborn**



The arrival of a new baby is often heralded with great preparations. Bitty clothes are washed, crib assembled, car seat installed.

You may even have planned out a new schedule, made a new budget and rearranged your home.

But few new parents are really prepared for the monopolizing energy of a baby. Where it used to take you 20 minutes to shower, dress and get out the door, with a newborn you're lucky if you can make it to a lunch date on time. Still, there are practical ways to further prepare so that everything won't descend into chaos once your baby arrives.

Here, experts offer seven ways to make the most of preparing for your new addition.

### **1. Plan ahead to keep medical records organized.**

You'll be amazed how often your baby has well-baby doctor visits the first year.

And since it's kind of stressful to get out of the house with everything you could possibly need, save yourself some trouble by keeping medical records and information in one place.

Dr. Marita G. Sane founded Organized Health ( [www.organized-health.com](http://www.organized-health.com) ) to give parents an easy filing system to keep everything collected.

"As a mother, you'll likely have only one hand free to do this, so 'My Child's HealthChart' is in an easily portable format that can be picked up with one hand and put right into a tote or diaper bag."

### **2. Select a babysitter.**

Perhaps sooner than later, you are going to need or want to go out without baby in tow, whether for a cup of coffee, to attend a wedding or just to run an errand. And if Grandma can't be on call 24/7, you may need to hire a sitter.

Before your baby is born, meet with several potential babysitters, get references and discuss their credentials.

Mary Schwartz at [www.Sittercity.com](http://www.Sittercity.com) recommends using the Internet to find qualified child-care providers who meet the specifications you set. "Look for someone who is experienced with infants and has special training (CPR, first-aid), so you have this service at your fingertips in case you need it," she says.

### **3. Stock the stations.**

You cannot overestimate the number of diapers you will change in the first few months of a baby's life. To save yourself the trouble of stumbling around in a sleepy stupor, purchase several attractive baskets and fill them with the essentials: diapers, wipes, diaper cream and burp cloths. Set them in different rooms of the house so you'll never have to go far for the supplies you need, suggests Suzy Martyn, author of "Enjoying the Ride: Tools, Tips, and Inspiration for the Parenting Journey," scheduled to be released in the fall.

Ocean View mom Tara Gates is getting ready for the arrival of her second baby. "I am setting up a little changing area for both children downstairs. I had to have an emergency C-section with my daughter and will be having another C-section this time. I am sure that I will be just fine, but it may help to not have to go up and down our stairs 100 times a day."

#### **4. Shore up social support and plan breaks.**

When my first daughter was born, none of my friends were married, much less having kids. I felt isolated and didn't have many people to talk to about the joys and frustrations of having a new baby. The second time around, I connected with a wonderful group of moms who were right there with me through the rough nights, colic and first smiles.

Deborah Roth Ledley, a psychologist at the Children's Center for OCD and Anxiety in Plymouth Meeting, Pa., and author of "Becoming a Calm Mom: How to Manage Stress and Enjoy the First Year of Motherhood," says a support system is key.

"New motherhood can be lonely for women, even those with supportive spouses and lots of friends," she says. "During the day, spouses and friends are at work, and long days at home with a new baby can be daunting." While still pregnant, women can find out about resources for new moms in their areas, such as breastfeeding support groups, moms groups and postnatal exercises classes, says Ledley, mom of two and founder of [www.thecalmmom.com](http://www.thecalmmom.com). Online chat rooms and social networking sites can be great resources, too.

#### **5. Set up an adult haven.**

Babies can be overwhelmingly adorable and loveable. They can also wear new parents out

#### **QUICKTIPS**

Lauren Kostka at the Home Safety Council offers these vital ways you can make your home as safe as possible for your baby:

- Put babies to sleep alone on their backs. Keep pillows, blankets and toys out of cribs. Do not hang anything with strings or ribbons over cribs. Mobiles should be removed once the baby starts to sit-up.
- Children can choke on small things like buttons, coins, jewelry and toys. If something is small enough to fit in a toilet paper tube, it is not safe for little children.
- Read the labels of all toys before you let your child play with them. Make sure your child is old enough to use that toy. The label will tell you the safe age.
- Window blind cords should not have a loop. Cut any loop in two pieces. Then place blind cords up high where children cannot get them.
- Make sure a smoke alarm is inside or near every bedroom. Test each smoke alarm every month. Push the test button until you hear a loud noise. Put new batteries in your smoke alarms at least one time each year.
- Use safety gates at the tops and bottoms of stairs. For the top of stairs, gates that screw to the wall are more secure than "pressure gates."
- Always use safety straps on high chairs, changing tables and strollers.
- Wipe up spills when they happen to reduce the chance of falls.
- Know the things in your home that are poisons; look at the labels for the words "Caution," "Warning," "Danger," "Poison," or "Keep Out of Reach of Children" on the box or bottle. Remove all medicines and medical supplies from purses, pockets and drawers. Keep them locked up.
- Put cleaners, medicines, alcohol and other poisons in a cabinet with a child safety lock or latch. Have child safety caps on all chemicals, medications and cleaning products.
- Know to call (800) 222-1222 if someone takes poison. This number will connect you to emergency help in your area. Keep the number near every phone.
- Put a carbon monoxide (CO) alarm near the bedrooms in your home. A CO alarm will tell you if the gas level is too high.
- Drowning can happen very fast. Most of the time you will not hear someone drowning. Stay within an arm's reach of young children when they are in or near water.
- Have toilet lid locks and use them. Put locks on the outside of the bathroom door to keep children out.
- Store large buckets turned over, so water cannot collect inside them. Very young children can drown in 1-2 inches of water.
- Put a high fence all the way around your pool or spa. Always keep the gate closed and locked.
- Hot water burns like fire. Set your home water heater at 120 degrees F to prevent burns. Use a water thermometer to test bath water. The water temperature should be at 100 degrees F.

and make them wonder if life will ever be normal again.

At those moments when you just need a few minutes' break, retreat to a section of your house for adults only. Marcie Jones, author and co-creator of the Great Expectations series, explains that moms sometimes are alone with their babies for 12 or 16 hours. "So when we do get help sometimes it's hard to relax even on the verge of burnout. I remember being with my daughter all day long, but then following her dad around the house watching him watch her because I was worried he would do something wrong! Of course not only did that burn me out, but it undermined his confidence, too." So set aside a quiet spot – a window seat, a loveseat in the study, even the back deck – that is a place where you can go to rest and rejuvenate. Don't forget earplugs.

## **6. Plan food and meal strategies.**

Mealtimes still come around three times a day, but you might find yourself grabbing an apple or piece of bread instead of sitting down. After all, when your baby's napping, the last thing you probably want to do is whip up a gourmet meal.

And when the baby is awake, you aren't even sure if you'll have one hand or two hands available.

Jones offers these tips:

- Buy a high chair with a recline setting for newborns that you can wheel into the kitchen so you have somewhere safe to put the baby while you cook.
- Make meals in advance and freeze them.
- Get a slow cooker, which allows you throw a bunch of ingredients in when you get the chance, and also to generate a lot of nice freezable leftovers.
- Do food prep in advance when you can, like cutting and peeling vegetables, and then save the time-sensitive stuff, like sautéing, for when baby is happy in the high chair or you have help.
- Buy nuts, fruit (fresh and dried), whole-grain crackers and cold cuts, and other high-quality calories you can grab and eat with one hand.
- Collect carryout and delivery menus for when all else fails.

## **7. Walk through the daily routine.**

A teacher in the Indian River School District, Gates is due in August. She and her husband have already worked out how the family will handle child care for Ava, 22 months, and the new baby, plus work responsibilities.

"As far as habits that need to be put in place, I am already a very organized person," says Gates, who has three months off for maternity leave. "Both children will be going to the same babysitter, which will make life very easy. My husband will take the kids in the morning and I will pick them up in the afternoon." Look at the logistics of what needs to happen daily and weekly, then split up responsibilities in such a way that both parents can quickly and easily see the tasks on the calendar.

### **SURVEY SAYS**

#### **Bring your house in line with home safety guidelines**

Your newborn may seem like he'll always lie still on a blanket, but before long, he'll be sitting up, swatting at things, and rolling around. The best time to babyproof a house to ensure your child's safety is before you even deliver.

A March 2009 Home Safety Council survey found that, while 99 percent of parents reported it was important that they brought their new baby home to a safe environment, most bought items to fill their baby's toy chest and dresser drawers and neglected to ensure their home was safe. In fact:

- Nearly nine in 10 (87 percent) new parents purchased new toys and baby clothes.
- Less than two in three (65 percent) made sure they had working smoke alarms in or near bedrooms.
- Less than half (49 percent) ensured they had a working carbon monoxide alarm in the home.
- Just 32 percent set their hot water heater to 120 degrees. • Only one-quarter created and practiced a fire escape plan to ensure they could get to their baby and get out of the home in time in the event of a fire.