



Mothers ~ One reason why this first month can be especially difficult is that you are still recovering physically from the stress of pregnancy and delivery. It may take weeks before your body is back to normal, your incisions (if you had an episiotomy or C-section) have healed, and you're able to resume everyday activities. You also may experience strong mood swings due to changes in the amount of hormones in your body. These changes can prompt sudden crying episodes for no apparent reason or feelings of mild depression for the first few weeks.

These emotions may be intensified by the exhaustion that comes with waking up every two or three hours at night to feed and change the baby.

If you experience these so-called "postpartum blues," they may make you feel a little "crazy," embarrassed or even that you're a "bad mother." Difficult as it may be, keep these emotions in perspective by reminding yourself that they're normal after pregnancy and delivery. Even fathers sometimes feel sad and unusually emotional after a new baby arrives (possibly a response to the psychological intensity of the experience). To keep the blues from dominating your life, and your enjoyment of your new baby, avoid isolating yourself in these early weeks. Try to nap when your baby does, so you don't get overtired. If these feelings persist past a few weeks or become severe, consult your pediatrician or your own physician about getting extra help.

Fathers ~ Some fathers feel shut off from the child and from the mother's attention and affections, especially if the baby is breastfed. The problem is not helped by the fact that sexual intercourse is usually prohibited by the obstetrician for these first few weeks. Even if it was allowed, many women simply aren't interested in sexual activity for a while after delivery because of the physical exhaustion and emotional stress they may be experiencing at this time. A positive way for men to deal with these issues is to become as involved as possible in caring for and playing with the new baby. When you spend this extra time with your baby, you'll get just as emotionally attached to her as her mother will.

This is not to say that moms and dads play with babies the same way. In general, fathers play to arouse and excite their babies, while mothers generally concentrate on more low-keyed stimulation, such as gentle rocking, quiet interactive games, singing and soothing activities. Fathers tend to roughhouse more, making lots of noise, and move the baby about more vigorously. The babies respond in kind, laughing and moving more with Dad than they do with Mom. From the baby's viewpoint, both play styles are equally valuable and complement each other beautifully, which is another reason why it's so important to have both parents involved in the care of the baby.