



Bonding With Your New Baby ~ If you have a delivery without complications, you'll be able to spend the first hour or so after birth holding, stroking and looking at your baby. Because babies are usually alert and very responsive during this time, researchers have labeled this the "sensitive period."

The first exchanges of eye contact, sounds and touches between the two of you are all part of a process called bonding, which helps lay the foundation for your relationship as parent and child. While it will take months

to learn your child's basic temperament and personality, many of the core emotions you feel for him may begin to develop during this brief period immediately after birth. As you gaze at him and he looks back, following your movements and perhaps even mirroring some of your expressions, you may feel a surge of protectiveness and awe. This is part of the attachment process.

It's also quite normal if you do not immediately have tremendously warm feelings for your baby. Labor is a demanding experience, and your first reaction to the birth may well be a sense of relief that at last it's over. If you're exhausted and emotionally drained, you may simply want to rest. That's perfectly normal. Give yourself a half hour or so until the strain of labor fades, and then request your baby. Bonding has no time limit.

Also, if your baby must be taken to the nursery right away for medical attention, or if you are sedated during the delivery, don't despair. You needn't worry that your relationship will be harmed because you didn't "bond" during this first hour. You can and will love your baby just as much, even if you weren't able to watch his birth or hold him immediately afterward. Your baby also will be fine, just as loving of you, and connected to you.

Mother's Feelings ~ If you're like most new mothers, your first few days with your baby will be a mixture of delight, pain, utter exhaustion, and, especially if this is your first child, some apprehension about your capabilities as a parent. When the anxiety levels peak, it will be difficult to believe that you'll ever be an expert on baby care. But rest assured. As soon as you're home, things will start to fall into place. So instead of worrying while in the hospital, take advantage of the time to rest and let your body recover.

Mother's Hormonal Changes ~ If the newness, fatigue and seemingly unanswerable questions push you to tears, don't feel bad. You won't be the first new mother to cry or the last. If it makes you feel any better, your hormones are at least partly responsible for your fragile state. The hormonal changes you went through as an adolescent, or experience during your menstrual cycle are minor compared to the hormonal overhaul you're undergoing after giving birth. Blame it on the hormones, and rest assured that this, too, shall pass.

Mother's Emotional Changes ~ In addition to the hormonal effects, significant emotional changes are taking place. You have just given birth to a wonderful new being, but also to a new and awesome responsibility. There are significant changes taking place in your family life and your relationship with your husband. It is normal to think about these things, and easy to attach too much importance to them.

It is not wise to dwell on them, or take them too seriously, however. If you think you are, you should discuss your concerns with your husband, obstetrician, pediatrician and other people whose judgment you respect and value. Do not be afraid to ask for help if your concerns seem too great for you to handle, or if you feel increasingly depressed. Although a certain amount of post delivery depression may be normal, it should not be overwhelming or last more than a few days.

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