



# A HANDBOOK FOR BEING THE BEST NEWBORN DAD/PARTNER EVER



By Caroline Chambers

There are so many resources for moms out there about how to get through labor and the first few months of newborn life, but there aren't many resources for new dads.

**So I asked my husband (who was a really great labor and postpartum partner for each of our three kids) and polled 20K+ women on Instagram, and compiled tips for how to be the best possible partner to a new mom.**

## PART I: DURING LABOR

1. **“Remain calm, cool, and collected.** Your wife is relying on you — this is not the time to exhibit stress. If the doctors aren't stressed, you have no reason to be stressed. If the doctors *are* stressed, you have every right to be stressed, but you need to hold it together for your wife and be the one who is remaining calm to the best of your ability.” —*this tip is from my husband, George*
2. **Try to avoid talking about yourself.** Make it all about your wife and her comfort. Your bed/chair may be uncomfortable, the game you want to watch might not be on, you might get hungry. Deal with those things, yes, but don't talk to your wife about them. Let her focus on her laboring body!
3. **The laboring mom is always right.** If she says something is wrong, you call the doctor. If she says she's in pain, you call the doctor. If she wants a new pillow, you get a friend to bring her a better pillow.
4. **Make sure she's comfortable.** Fluff that pillow. Check in regularly to see if she needs to go to the bathroom. Does she need more water? Find the water fountain. Does she want a back rub? Get on it.
5. **Communicate with family and friends.** Unless your wife has gotten an epidural, feels great, and *wants* to text, you are in charge of updating friends and family on the progression of labor.
6. **Handle the logistics.** Don't forget the insurance card, IDs, chargers, snacks for after delivery, and anything else she's laid out for the big day. If you *do* forget something, figure out a way to get it without stressing her out.
7. **If you see something, say nothing.** We never want to hear ANYTHING about what you saw or heard during labor. Did we poop while pushing? That's between us and God and also our entire medical team. If we ask you, you can tell us. But you can absolutely not bring it up on your own.

## WHAT SHE \*MIGHT\* BE HEALING FROM

On the next page we'll get into ways to support your partner postpartum, aka after the baby's birth. But first, know that recovery from childbirth can be HARD, and she'll likely be in pain even if she's acting tough. Here's a short list of things she *COULD* be healing from or experiencing during the first few weeks postpartum:

- Vaginal soreness and possibly perineal stitches
- Hemorrhoids
- Painful first poops
- Bleeding that lasts for weeks
- Uterine contractions
- Incontinence or bladder issues
- MAJOR abdominal surgery, if she had a C-section
- Severe hormone fluctuations
- Engorgement (swollen breasts from a surplus of milk production)
- Nipple blisters



## PART 2: AFTER BABY'S BIRTH

*Here's the gist: Mom's job right now is to sleep, recover, and nurse the baby, if she's into that. Until she is healed and feels normal, your job is everything else. This is not forever! But you need to be her village right now. Here are specific things you can do:*

1. **Be her nurse.** Your partner will be on a specific schedule of pain meds and stool softeners when you leave the hospital. Set timers so she doesn't miss a dose, and bring her the meds with water.
2. **Change the baby's diaper.** The rule is: If you're wearing a diaper (like many women are postpartum), you don't have to change the baby's diaper. Especially at night, this is a huge way you can help.
3. **Learn to swaddle the baby.** This is another way to help out at night. She nurses the baby — you change the diaper, re-swaddle, and put him or her back to sleep. If you're bottle feeding, you can alternate!
4. **Wash the bottles and pump parts.** If your partner's pumping and/or if you're feeding the baby formula, there will be a LOT of hand washing.
5. **Keep mom fed.** If you don't know how to cook, stock the fridge with store-bought soups and make her grilled cheese and soup. Buy bagged salad kits and add rotisserie chicken. Order takeout. Fix her breakfast (eggs, toast, granola, yogurt, fruit, oatmeal, etc.). You can do this.
6. **Bring her water.** Anytime mom sits down to nurse, bring her water. Any other time she asks for water, RUN, DON'T WALK to get her some. Especially if she's breastfeeding, the postpartum thirst is intense.
7. **Bring her snacks.** Same if she says she's hungry. And bring her a little snack anytime she's nursing.
8. **Keep the house tidy.** Caring for a newborn is overstimulating. All the holding, crying, nursing — it's a lot on the body (especially one that's hormonal and still in pain), and visual clutter or mess adds to it.
9. **Be the bouncer.** Don't let family, friends, or neighbors come inside the house unannounced. She may crave that connection to others, OR she may not be up for it at all. Ask her what she wants, and translate that to others.
10. **Do the store runs.** Keep the diapers and formula in stock. Ask if she needs diapers/pads, nipple ointment, witch hazel pads (for hemorrhoids), certain snacks, etc.
11. **Know that there could be some rage.** The postpartum mood swings and out-of-nowhere anger can be intense. It's a hormone thing. Be gentle and kind with her, even when she isn't with you. Know that this will NOT last forever.
12. **Prepare to be micromanaged.** It will be annoying, but here's the thing: In many male-female relationships, the mom truly does know more than the dad about the baby, at least at first. So when we see you changing the diaper in a way that we think will make the baby uncomfortable or won't catch the pee, we correct. When we see you folding the onesies wrong, we correct. As a recovering micromanager, I'm willing to admit that this is *really* annoying, but it's something almost every new mom does unintentionally.
  - a. **If she is driving you crazy, here's a script:** *"Babe, you are doing such an amazing job with the baby, and I am just trying to learn and do my best too. Right now you know the baby better than I do, but I'm trying to get to know him/her too. Sometimes I might mess things up, but know that I'm trying my hardest, and I might need to make a few mistakes to learn how to do things my way."*
13. **Let's talk about sex, baby.** Your wife will have a check up with her doctor at 6 weeks postpartum and, in theory, may be told she's healed enough to have sex — but that doesn't mean she's ready. Do your best not to hound her on this, and let her tell you when she's ready. Just trust me on this, everything's going to go a lot smoother if you let her tell her when it's time.
14. **Communicate and delegate.** You're only human, and she knows that. But you're also the person in your relationship who's more stable emotionally and physically right now, so you need to initiate the conversations needed to get on the same page. If you have other kids or don't get paternity leave, you may need to bring in babysitters or family to get all of the above done. If those aren't options for you, ask your partner what she needs most from you each day. Is it a tidy house, or is it a homemade, nourishing dinner? Is it to tend to the big kids, or is it to hold the baby so she can take the big kids to school and/or go for a walk one morning? The more you check in, the better.