



Your Baby

Baby has arrived – congratulations! You will be making many decisions about what to do & how best to provide for the health of your child. You will also have to take good care of yourself. This chapter offers some general information & ideas to guide you.

Feeding

Breastfeeding is best for the health of your baby. Here are some reasons why:

Breast milk is the perfect food for baby

The first milk (colostrum) contains important antibodies which help protect baby from infections

Breastfed babies are less likely to suffer Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)

Breastfeeding helps you & baby to bond

From your point of view, breastfeeding is very convenient because it doesn't cost money & you don't have the hassle of preparing & sterilising bottles. It's helpful to be prepared. While you are pregnant, discuss breastfeeding with your Lead Maternity Carer (LMC). Read about it & talk to other mothers who have breastfed. It may not be easy at first but don't let this put you off because it's worth it. Most problems can be overcome with the right advice & support.

Bottlefeeding

Breastfeeding is best, but sometimes bottlefeeding is the most suitable option. Modern formulas are nutritionally balanced & if used correctly provide babies with good nourishment. It's important to get advice from your LMC, Plunket staff member, or doctor when choosing the type of formula & learning how to mix it up exactly right. Also, make sure you learn about safe bottlefeeding, for example, hygiene & sterilising bottles correctly.

“I breastfed my son until he was 9 months old & I would recommend it to all young mothers. The first few days were awful because it was so painful. I had this fantasy in my head that I would just know how to breastfeed, like my maternal instinct would guide me. How wrong I was! After 3 days of absolute hell a nurse came in & sat with me while I fed. She made some small adjustments to how I was holding my son on my breast & explained why I should hold him like that. That’s all it took really, it stopped hurting so much, & then I was off. I think it took me about 2 weeks to feel like I really had the hang of it.”

Rachel (age 17)

Caring for baby

There is a lot to learn about the day-to-day care of baby. Equip yourself with knowledge, trust your judgment & don’t be afraid to ask questions. You can get information & advice from:

Plunket

Plunket is a free service to all mothers with children. You are offered a number of home visits soon after the baby’s birth. These visits provide support, health & development assessments, & information to enable you to make positive choices about child health & parenting. The service is holistic & also provides care & support for maternal and family/whanau health & well-being. Make sure you get hold of a free copy of Plunket’s publication called *Thriving Under Five*. It provides valuable information on health issues, child development, safety, caring for yourself & day-to-day care of baby.

*Plunket 24-hour toll free
hotline for parents
0800 933 922
www.plunket.org.nz*

Other parents

Talk & share information with other parents. Some young mums feel that they can't relate to older parents & if they don't know any other young mums, they can be very lonely & isolated. It's important that you have contact with other parents. Find out about parent support groups in your area – they offer support & many hold helpful classes, activities & talks. There are support groups especially for young mums & solo mums. For contacts look up *Support Groups* in the service directory provided with this booklet.

Library

Libraries have lots of good books about caring for baby, child health, child development & parenting. Why not become a regular visitor to your local library. Most libraries have regular story times & other activities your child will enjoy as he/she gets older.

Internet

The internet has loads of websites with information & support; some are especially for young mums. Try typing in any of these keywords:

“child health”
“parenting”
“teenage parent”

The following websites come recommended by other young mothers:

www.kidshealth.org
www.hipmama.com
www.girlmom.com
www.oneyoungparent.com

Childhood immunisations

Immunisations (vaccinations) are offered free to all children in Aotearoa New Zealand. The Ministry of Health recommend that you immunise your children. They help protect against 9 serious diseases. The diseases can have serious complications, & some children die from these complications. Immunisations begin when your child is 6 weeks old & can be completed with 6 visits to a doctor or nurse. To be fully protected,

children need to have all the immunisations in the series, so it's important that you attend all your appointments.

Some parents may hesitate about getting their children immunised because they are worried about complications or their children developing the illness the vaccine is supposed to prevent. Although it's true that some vaccines could have these effects, the chances of this happening are very small. Not immunising children puts them in more danger because it is possible they may contract one of the serious diseases that immunisation has been designed to prevent. If you have concerns or questions about immunisation talk to your doctor, nurse or other health worker.

The immunisations that your child get will be written in their Well Child-Tamariki Ora Health Book. Usually children require an Immunisation Certificate before they attend a pre-school, crèche or kindergarten, or start school.

For information about
immunisation call
0800 immune
0800 466 8634



How are you?

Being a parent is 24/7. As well as being rewarding, it can also be stressful, tiring & sometimes lonely, particularly for young parents. Take steps to look after yourself. Here are some issues you may face & some ways to deal with them.

tiredness

Lots of parents experience extreme tiredness & exhaustion, especially in the first few months after the birth of their baby. This isn't surprising since you are having broken sleep & are working very hard looking after a child. What can you do to help yourself?

*Accept offers of help people make.
It lets them contribute to your &
baby's well-being*

Make sure you don't overdo it, by sorting out what must get done around the house & what can be left

*Have naps when your baby
is sleeping*

Eat a balanced diet & ensure you are getting an adequate intake of iron. If you are unsure about this, talk to your doctor or Plunket staff member

Ask for help if you need it. Some young mums feel that they can't ask their friends or family for help because they have to prove that they are coping. Remember that coping involves knowing when to ask for help. If you don't know anyone who you can ask, call a parenting hotline because they will be able to refer you to an organisation that may be able to help you.

**Barnardo's
Helpline
0800 222 345**



Go easy on yourself

Many parents have romantic ideas about what it will be like to have a baby. They think that when baby arrives all the right feelings will come naturally & they'll know just what to do. Then they feel bad when faced with a real life baby who seems all work & tires them out day after day. It's important to understand that almost all parents have mixed feelings about their babies at some stage, though not all will admit it. Make sure you talk with someone about your feelings towards your baby.

Feeling sad

You may feel low or 'have the blues' for a few days after the birth of your baby. This is normal & only lasts a short time. If these feelings don't go away, you should talk about how you are feeling with a health professional, as you may be suffering from postnatal depression.

postnatal depression

Postnatal depression is a lot more severe than "the blues". It can last for up to 1 year, or even longer without treatment. Often mothers don't realise they are depressed; they suffer in silence, thinking they are a "bad mother" & feel they just have to get on with things & cope. Postnatal depression is an illness & there is help available. How do you know if you have postnatal depression? Ask yourself if any of the following describe how you are feeling:

- ☉ I am often anxious or worried for no good reason
- ☉ I have felt scared or panicky for no good reason
- ☉ I often feel sad or miserable
- ☉ Things have been getting on top of me a lot lately
- ☉ I have a poor appetite
- ☉ I don't look forward with enjoyment to things as I used to
- ☉ I have been so unhappy that I have been crying
- ☉ I have thought about harming myself & my baby
- ☉ I have difficulty sleeping

If you think that some of these points describe how you are feeling a lot of the time, you may like to get help from your doctor, Plunket staff member, or other trusted people. Your doctor can refer you to the Maternal Mental Health team run by your local district health board. There are support groups & help available from parenting hotlines. Look up *Support Groups* in the service directory provided with this booklet.

“I had really bad postnatal depression for about a year. I was so lonely because none of my friends had babies & I didn’t want to bring everyone down by moaning about how crappy I felt. My mother said that I wasn’t coping, because I was so young, & why in the first place did I ever think I would. I know now that postnatal depression is an illness & mothers of all age can suffer from it.”

Steph (age 18)

Keep connected

Being a young parent can be really lonely, especially if none of your friends have children or you don’t have transport to get out & about. Sometimes it may feel like you are stuck at home day-after-day changing nappies & doing housework. Sometimes organising you & your child to get out of the house is such a mission that it hardly seems worth the effort! Just because you are a parent doesn’t mean you can’t have friends & contact with the ‘outside world’. In fact, it’s very important for your mental well-being that you keep connected with people & the community. **Here are some ideas:**

- **Make the effort to see friends, family & whanau**
- **Get out & about with your child – visit parks, community centers, the library etc**
- **Need to make new friends? You can meet other young parents at parenting classes & support groups**
- **Try & work out a way that you can participate in a hobby or sport**