



Becoming a dad is a major life transition. While it can be a joyful and meaningful time, it can also feel overwhelming, exhausting and stressful. Many new dads are juggling disrupted sleep, increased responsibilities at home, changes to their relationship, and pressure at work, often all at once.

It's common for new dads to feel run down, worried, irritable or unsure of how they're coping. In fact, around 1 in 10 new dads experience perinatal anxiety or depression. You're not weak for feeling this way, and you're certainly not alone. Looking after your own wellbeing is not selfish, it's an important part of supporting your partner, your baby and yourself.

Tips & Strategies To Support Your Wellbeing

Start & Keep Talking

Opening up and sharing how you're feeling as a dad is an important first step. It can also be one of the hardest. Support might include:

- Talking with your partner, a friend or family member
- Speaking with your regular GP, who can discuss support options specific to your needs
- Speaking with a mental health professional

Dads sometimes experience distress differently — including physical symptoms such as headaches, irritability or difficulty concentrating. These are all valid signs that support could help. Talking can reduce isolation, help you feel more understood, and make it easier to get the support you need.

Stay Connected

Fatherhood can be isolating, especially in the early months, with a survey from the *Movember Foundation* found that one in five men lost close friends within a year of becoming a dad. Making time to connect with others can help reduce stress and remind you that you're not alone.

- Talk with friends, family or other dads about how you're going
- Stay connected with workmates or trusted people, even with short check-ins
- Spending time with others can lift mood and reduce the mental load
- Find a local Dad's Group, or start your own

Exercise & Keep Moving

One study in *Social Science & Medicine* found that young men who become fathers do about five fewer hours of exercise per week. Physical activity releases brain chemicals that can improve both physical and mental health. It doesn't need to be a big workout, just aim for what's realistic

- Gentle exercise can improve mood, energy and sleep
- A walk, stretching, or short bursts of movement are all helpful
- If possible, get some fresh air and daylight into your routine. This can be on your lunch break or simply get off the bus or train stop earlier and enjoy the extra walk

Eat Well & Fuel Your Body

When you're tired, it's easy to skip meals or rely on quick options. Eating regularly and drinking enough water can help with energy, concentration and mood.

- Aim for simple nutritious foods
- Stay hydrated and drink water regularly
- Try not to rely solely on caffeine to get through the day
- Keep options easy at home to make it more achievable during busy weeks

Get Smart About Rest

Sleep deprivation is a normal part of early parenthood, but ongoing exhaustion can affect mood and your ability to cope. While you can't control baby night wakes, you can put some things into place to protect your rest.

- Go to bed earlier when you can
- Rest when the opportunity arises, even if sleep isn't guaranteed
- Talk with your partner about sharing rest where possible
- Reduce screen or phone time around evenings



Set Realistic Boundaries

Managing the competing demands of work and family can often feel like mission impossible and can lead to burnout. Setting boundaries for yourself is a good start.

- Set realistic expectations for yourself, such as accepting that you may not be able to do everything at the same pace or standard as before becoming a dad.
- Where possible, hold boundaries at work, for example, don't check work emails after 6pm
- Also communicate boundaries at home, for example, discussing how you prefer to stay in touch during the day, such as texting for non-urgent things.
- Let others know when you need support or flexibility

Inform Yourself

Pregnancy and early parenthood can bring a lot of unknowns. Sometimes it can help to do some reading, learn from reliable sources and build confidence through knowledge.

- Fact sheets, checklists and apps can help you feel more prepared
- Learning from trusted and credible sources can make each stage feel more manageable
- Attend antenatal appointments with your partner and invest some time in antenatal classes if available in your area (or check out online options)

Play The Long Game

In the early weeks, some dads worry if they don't feel an immediate or overwhelming sense of attachment to their baby. Connection takes time, and it's okay if that bond develops gradually.

- Try not to put pressure on yourself if attachment doesn't happen straight away
- Small moments of connection like bathing, changing or helping to feed baby are easy moments of bonding
- Regular cuddles, care and play can help build connection over time

Take It Easy On Yourself

There is often pressure on dads to 'hold it together' and to be the 'rock' for their families. Men often feel pressure to be providers for their growing families with 72% of new dads feeling an increased sense of financial responsibility, according to recent data from *Movember*. These expectations can be tough and unrealistic. Remember:

- Remind yourself that you are doing the best you can
- It's okay not to have all the answers
- Parenthood involves learning and adjustment
- Give yourself permission to take things one step at a time

Support Services

Taking the next step and seeking professional support can feel daunting, especially when you're already stretched. If you've been feeling low, anxious, irritable or disconnected for two weeks or more, or things feel like they're getting harder rather than easier, extra support may help.

There are trusted services and resources available to support dads through pregnancy, early parenthood and the challenges that can come during this time, including:

- **Gidget Foundation Australia**
- **Beyond Blue**
- **DadSpace**
- **Lifeline**
- **PANDA (Perinatal Anxiety & Depression Australia)**
- **SMS4Dads**

Seeking help is a sign of strength, not failure. Early support can make a meaningful difference for you, your partner and your baby, and there are professionals ready to listen and help. 🌸