

THE COMPLETE Pre- & Post-Partum PRIMER

A baby. The one little person who can turn your whole world upside down, while at the same time turn your wallet inside out.

Babies are expensive - the growing of them, the having of them and the keeping of them. It can be a bit overwhelming when you're trying to decide exactly what you really require during pregnancy, and during the first few months (sometimes referred to as the 'hundred days of horror,' but that's another story). We've polled real women who (appropriately) provide the "real poop" on what you really need.

Best Pieces of Maternity Clothing:

♥ Any items of maternity clothing your friends give you which actually a) fit you and b) were manufactured in the last three years. The odds of scoring both of these things are approximately one in one hundred, so up the odds and take all offers. While Sue was expecting her third, her boss lent her a long black skirt that she could team with almost any top. Perfect find!

♥ Sweater and matching skirt. This ensemble allowed Heather H., who was expecting her first, to feel "not too formal, but business-oriented and warm and cozy" during her mid-winter pregnancy.

♥ Black leather (or "pleather") pants. While expecting her second, trendy Cory felt like "quite the stylish preggy lady, versus the big roly-poly lady, while wearing them."

♥ Belly Harness: It's as charming as it sounds. Helps heft up the extra poundage to take the strain off your aching back. Particularly great if you're tiny, like Leslie M., who found her new belly weight a

challenge to carry about.

♥ Maternity panties. Heather C. loved these so much that she just recently stopped wearing them (baby is almost a year old). There must be one husband breathing a sigh of relief.

♥ They're everywhere...thong underwear has come to the maternity section, and Catherine couldn't be happier. This is, of course, dependent upon whether you find thong underwear comfortable to begin with.

Baby Showers

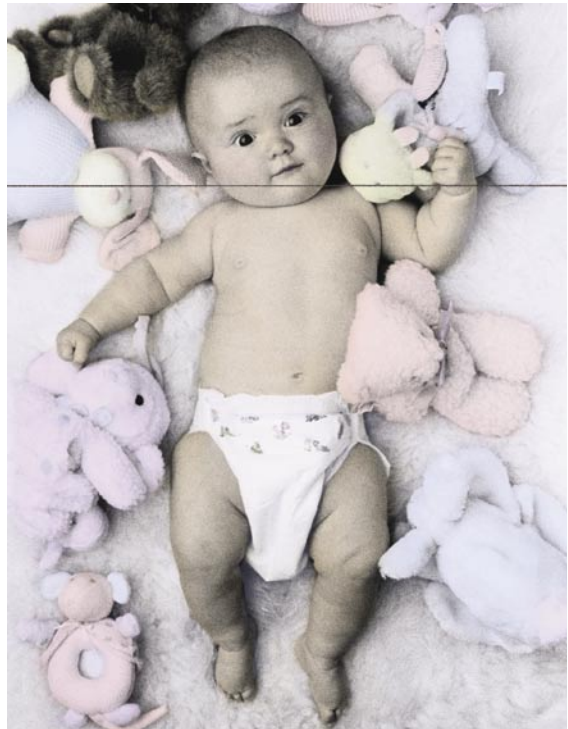
Enjoy it - you'll likely never get another, no matter how many kids you crank out. If the thought of all the "oohs" and "aahhs" over the teensy little sleepers makes you cringe, invite the husbands along. Nothing like a bunch of men to steer the conversation away from babies (for once!) and onto something inane like World War II or banking.

Best Baby Gifts to Hint about to your Baby Shower Organizers:

♥ Gift certificates for spa pedicures, pedicures and more pedicures. You can't see your own feet, but the professionals can. These are addictive and wonderful.

♥ Nursing pillows that look like an overstuffed horseshoe. These are great while breastfeeding, bottle feeding and for propping a baby who can't quite achieve it on his own.

♥ Bottle/food warmer. First time parents will heed the warnings to not microwave their infant's bottles, so this makes a perfect gift. Susan and Garmon still use it for their one-year-old when they



need to heat up a quick meal in the car.

♥ "Baby Games" by Elaine Martin. Mother of twins, Susan, found this book helpful as - surprise! - babies "don't always eat and sleep." Watching a newborn can be at the same time the most challenging, and the most boring job in the world - this will provide ideas to help fill baby's waking hours.

♥ Baby clothes that are bigger than twelve-month size. It helps if the sex of the child has been announced. Stuffing Bob Jr. into a mint green sleeper may not go over big with Dad.

♥ Portable high chair. The version offered by First Years is particularly compact and sturdy. Chances are, you still have some childfree friends (they're the calm, tidy ones) you will want to visit with Junior in tow. Sue and Matt leave a portable high chair in the van so they're always prepared.

♥ Gift certificates to babysit the expectant couple's existing kids. Deb suggested this to give tired Mom and Dad the chance to go out together, alone, just one more time... Eva added that getting friends to take hubby as well can really give you a break.

♥ Gift certificates for great food. There are plenty of places happy

to prepare homecooked meals for you to enjoy in the early days of new parenthood. Beware though: A personal chef can become an expensive habit.

♥ Dustbuster. You will need it. You will find out just how many ways once the baby is here.

♥ Disposable camera. Just when you need it the most (not during delivery!), your camera will be missing or inoperable. An extra will always come in handy for new parents.

Tried & True Time Savers for New Parents.

♥ Internet grocery shopping. Hands down the number one time and stress saver. Pure nirvana, although you will pay a premium. It is well worth it the first few weeks, when you never seem to have enough diapers in the house. Newborns go through how many in a day??? Check out www.grocerygateway.com, or www.egrocer.ca for delivery in your neighbourhood.

♥ Grocery store salad bar. Eva found this invaluable when her third was a newborn. "Not only can you pick up salads, but this is also useful for stir-fries." And it's healthy...your license to eat, eat, eat has expired, remember!

Getting through the first few months: Advice for new Moms, straight from the front.

The Grass Isn't Always Greener:

"Always remember there is someone else out there that has it worse than you," says ever-optimistic Eva. "Enjoy it where you can because they really do grow up fast."

Enjoy It While You Can: "During pregnancy, get all the rest and pampering you can now, as you won't be able to once the baby arrives", says Leslie. This is unfortunately usually only achievable with the first baby, so take advantage.

Sleep, sleep, SLEEP! "Sleep when the baby sleeps." Easier said than done, but the laundry can wait. My personal philosophy, with four children, is that I try not to do chores while the kids are asleep or quiet that I can do when they are awake (laundry, cooking, etc), and focus on the things I need quiet for (reading, writing, phone calls, etc).

In-laws, outlaws: "Don't have the in-laws stay with you right away; have a routine in place before they come..." advises a new parent, whose identity will be hidden for her own protection. Another anonymous tipster advised "not to have any one family member staying in your house for more than ten days at a time, unless you don't particularly care about your relations with them." Additionally, try to keep the help away for the first few days for you, Dad and baby to bond alone.

Trust yourself...even when you don't. "Do what you feel is right because your experience isn't the same as anyone else's, despite what others might think." The saying that "every child has a different mother" is also true. My firstborn had a more neurotic mother than my fourth.

Look on the bright side: "Cherish the first three months. Getting up at night is a very intimate time for new parents and baby and it goes by so quickly." With her second, Kelly relished her midnight rendezvous because it was the only time she could snuggle her baby without her first child feeling jealous. And it really won't last forever. The day will come when you can barely rouse your seventeen-year-old out of bed.

♥ Two change tables, one on each floor. Heather and Paul saved time and energy running up to the baby's room every time Junior left a thoughtful deposit. They bought their second table second-hand at a garage sale and kept it by the back door, for easy disposal of stinkies. Another mom simply used a change pad with sides on top of the washing machine for quick main-floor changes.

♥ Diaper service. Now even disposable diapers can be delivered by a number of companies and picked up for recycling through Small Planet or put in your Green Bin (if your area has this service - it will be available across the GTA in the coming year). One step removed from the disposal of these timebombs can be a blessing.

♥ Automatic deposit of Employment Insurance cheques was a great benefit to Heather C. Even a trip to the bank can be an onerous task with a newborn - guess the flashing lights of the ABM just aren't as exciting to them as they are to us.

♥ Cleaning services. See if your budget can stretch to get a cleaning service for the first few weeks. Imagine walking into a pristine house after taking your baby out for your scheduled two-hour afternoon walk. You're refreshed, the house is clean and the baby might just sleep on for a few more minutes...breathe in the elusive scent of clean and enjoy.

♥ Dry-cleaning pick-up and drop-off at your door. There are many providers of this service in the GTA, particularly helpful in the winter months when the afternoon walks have dwindled.

Best Book for New/Expectant Mothers:

It's a tie! The best two books, while quite different, attempt to give first time mothers in particular all the 'real dirt' on what they will be facing. At times a bit militant, with a tendency to gloss over some of the real details, "What to Expect While You're Expecting" by Murkoff, Eisenberg-Hathaway and Eisenberg is a perennial favourite. They sound like a law firm, and



they can be just as dry in some sections. Second and third timers did find that this book became less and less helpful.

A more humorous look on the pregnancy and birth events can be found in the "Girlfriends' Guide to Pregnancy", by Vicki Iovine. It does provide useful advice, but does so in a very light-hearted and down to earth manner. Ms. Iovine offers books on the first year, toddlers, birthday parties, and 'getting your groove' back as well.

Other honourable mentions include Penny Simkin's "Birth Partner", and Penelope Leach's "Your Baby & Child", for after the baby is born, and up to age 5. Throw away the Dr. Spock right now - however tempted you might be to take his advice on "leaving baby in the back garden each afternoon for two hours of fresh air."

The Most Essential for Your Diaper Bag:

To clarify, a "diaper bag" doesn't have to be an insulated, Beatrix Potter-decorated monstrosity. It can be an LCBO plastic bag, a Prada \$1,400 wonder bag, or even a black carryall that can go anywhere. Its what's inside that counts. (Note to new moms: Buy stock in Ziplock bags the moment you find out you're pregnant.)

- ♥ Diapers (duh!)
- ♥ Wet wipes in a handy travel container.
- ♥ Full change of clothes for baby

that still fit and are seasonal.

- ♥ Plastic grocery bags for easy diaper disposal.
- ♥ Hand sanitizer, travel size.
- ♥ Diaper cream, if baby has a history of needing extra help.
- ♥ Sterilized bottle and can of formula (or for pure breast-feeders, extra breast pads and perhaps a breastfeeding 'cape' - Kooshies makes a good one - for the more modest crowd). A sterilized soother (i.e. plug) in a ziplock can also be helpful (think church, snotty retail stores and small cars).
- ♥ Receiving blanket, which can double as washable change mat.
- ♥ Plastic links - many uses from teething to linking shopping bags to carts, toys, etc.
- ♥ Sunscreen and the ubiquitous disposable camera - you'll need it most when you don't have it.
- ♥ Keep a large Ziplock in your car(s), which includes a diaper, wipes, and a receiving blanket, or small change pad, in case your sleep deprived brain allows you to forget the 'real' diaper bag once in a while.

Remember that while being pregnant and tending to a newborn are exhausting, thankless jobs, you will look back with fondness on them when you're dealing with your pre-teen daughter's hormonal rages.

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