

Pregnancy Tips for New Dads

By Rob Whyte

You're going to be a daddy for the first time. Are you ready for the challenges that lie ahead?

In time, you'll discover that being a parent can be financially taxing, physically exhausting, and the best thing that ever happened to you. In the short term, while your wife is pregnant, you're bound to encounter a mental challenge. How you respond to this challenge can set the tone for your family life experience. So, it's a big deal.

Here's the challenge: change the way you see yourself. Before the pregnancy, you were a partner in a relationship. During the pregnancy and beyond, you're less important. Adapting to that ego-crushing change is essential if you want to have a happy family life.

Like many young dads during pregnancy, you might be eager to learn. You buy books and read blogs looking for survival tips. There's lots of information around, and some of it is useful. But a lot of it, based on my experience, is post-modern gobbledegook.

Here's why. Experts are eager to tell men how to feel. They say you are lucky and should feel happy. They remind men that being a dad is important, so we should take it seriously as if we didn't before. That kind of advice never really rang true for me when I was a young dad. It sounded hollow. Those platitudes had no meaning, and certainly provided no help when I felt isolated, lost, and even a little bitter. Telling me that I ought to feel happy didn't help; it made things worse.

Years later, I learned those negative feelings developed because I lacked context. I didn't understand the world or my place as a father. In other words, I didn't know how to become a dad.

I did some reading and discovered a context that made sense to me. It helped me make sense of the world and define my place. That context was sports.

Sports analogies provide men with life lessons they understand. The rules are easy to learn, and the tasks are easy to perform. And like any sport, the more you practice, the better you get.

Based on that context, here are five pregnancy tips to help young dads succeed in the wildest game of their life.

1 Know Your Role

To be a great dad during your wife's pregnancy, understand your role in the family dynamic. You're the backup goalie on a hockey team. You're the third-string quarterback on a football team. You are the guy carrying a clipboard on the pitch.

Becoming comfortable with your role is very Zen. Once you accept your position on the team's depth chart, a measure of spiritual calmness comes your way. When you are at peace, you can become the rock that creates and supports a wondrous family experience.

2 Stay Positive

Never gripe about your situation to your wife. The baby is the star, your wife is the head coach, and they don't have the time or energy to soothe whimpers from the bench.

Your buddies might listen. Feel free to grumble as much as they will tolerate it. Don't be surprised if they tell you to stuff it after a five-minute rant.

3 Stay in Game Shape

During the third trimester, your wife's body experiences fantastic changes. She's big, bloated, and uncomfortable. Her joints hurt, and her back aches.

You can help. Learn to give soothing massages. If you are not massage-ready, get ready by improving your hand strength and physical endurance (can you give a 20-minute foot massage?). If you're going to buy a book that helps dads during pregnancy, get one that teaches you how to massage a pregnant woman safely.

Providing your partner with temporary pain relief is a cool thing to do, but young dads get an extra benefit. As you massage her body every week (and eventually every night), the miracle of life unfolds in front of your eyes. Watch her hips open up as the body naturally prepares for birth. It's an experience you won't forget and shouldn't miss.

4 Be a Hero

Just because you are a backup player, doesn't mean you can't contribute. If you need inspiration, consider the Kurt Warner story.

In 1994, Kurt was a fledgling American quarterback who couldn't get a job. At one point, he worked in a grocery store while struggling to land a job with a professional team. In 1999, he became the backup quarterback for the St Louis Rams. The starting quarterback was injured in a pre-season game. Kurt came off the bench and pulled off a miracle. He helped the team win the NFL championship that year and won the MVP award.

Dads can be a hero during pregnancy by contributing in big and small ways. Buy flowers, make dinner, vacuum the floor, pick up the groceries, clean your room, paint her toenails, and tell her she looks beautiful.

The most important contribution a new dad can make is also the toughest. When she talks, complains, or moans, you listen. Don't say anything, and don't try to fix anything. Just listen.

5 Take the Ragging

As a benchwarmer, you'll be the target of hormone-driven outbursts that question the quality of your character, and worse. Keep that Zen mindset and laugh off the insults.

You will also get unusual food demands from your pregnant wife. To avoid disagreements that you can't possibly win, answer, "Yes, dear," and go buy the stuff. My pregnant wife once asked me to buy some special bread from a bakery that was an hour away. I made a rookie mistake. I asked if I could buy the same bread from a bakery down the street. After a long pregnant pause, I left the house for the distant bakery.

Benchwarmers don't argue with the head coach.