

What your baby expects

In brief

Becoming a parent can be both a beautiful experience and a challenging one. New life raises all kinds of new questions. This brochure is about your first few weeks as a parent.

It will tell you more about:

- What your baby expects
- The importance of bonding
- Crying
- Family-centred and development-centred care

All babies are born with certain expectations. They have been listening to all kinds of sounds for a long time and have been as one with their mothers. Parents have their own expectations too. A baby is a unique being who displays unique behaviour, which can sometimes differ from parents' expectations.

Intuition, love and just being there for your baby will go a long way, but you can never be fully prepared for every emotion you will feel when your baby finally arrives.

Preparation during pregnancy

The bonding process starts as soon as you find out you are pregnant. This is also the perfect time to start preparing. Good preparation involves more than simply buying things for your baby. You should start thinking about how to divide childcare duties, how to raise your baby and how everything might work out.

Brain development

Your baby's brain grows at an incredible pace during pregnancy. You can support brain development by talking quietly to your baby, caressing your belly or playing music. Feel free to encourage other family members to do the same.

How you interact with your baby has an impact on his physical and mental development. To ensure the best possible bond between you and your baby, it is important to fulfil his natural

needs after you give birth, regardless of how you feed your baby.

What your baby expects

The transition from life inside the womb to life outside is huge. In your womb, there was constant movement and sound, food on demand 24/7 through the umbilical cord, and a stable temperature. All babies need time to get used to the outside world after birth. Their digestive system starts working as a result of the new food they are getting, and there are all kinds of new smells and sounds.

Oxytocin (love hormone)

Newborn babies have a need to be close to their parents, as it helps them feel safe and protected. When babies feel safe, oxytocin (the love hormone) is released, which has a positive impact on their brain development.

Babies who feel safe during the first few weeks of their lives turn out to be happier babies and will grow up feeling more self-confident. Holding your baby, talking to him and smiling at him releases oxytocin in both baby and parents, and both will feel calmer and happier as a result.

Meeting your baby for the first time

Skin-to-skin contact immediately after birth will help your baby get used to life outside the womb, allow him to get some rest, and keep him warm. It will also help you get to know one another. You can have as much skin-to-skin contact as you want, for as long as you want.

Breastfeeding

If you are breastfeeding your baby, he will start looking for your breast after a little while. Breastfeeding also triggers a release of oxytocin. It's impossible to overfeed your baby during the first few days, so you can also use breastfeeding to comfort your baby.

Bottle feeding

If you are bottle feeding your baby, we recommend that you have your first feeding sessions during skin-to-skin contact. Looking at your baby while bottle feeding encourages bonding. Make sure you learn how to recognise your baby's feeding cues, so you can feed on demand.

Family-centred and development-centred care

Family-centred care at Máxima Medical Centre means that both parents can stay with their baby at the hospital. Parents are in charge of their baby's care, supported by professionals. Together, they form a team that puts the guidelines for family-centred care into practice.

If your baby is admitted to the neonatal unit or Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), one of the parents can always stay with him throughout his entire time in hospital. The time you spend together this way will help you bond. One exception to this rule is when the mother is severely ill herself.

If you have no medical conditions and you are staying the night with your baby, we will pass the cost of these hospital stays to your health insurance provider up to 28 days after you gave birth. Your basic insurance will cover this, but you will need to pay a deductible. You may have supplementary coverage that reduces your deductible. Contact your health insurer for more information.

If you have had a multiple birth, we will do everything we can to allow both parents to spend the night at the hospital if they want to. However, this depends on the availability of our larger rooms.

Providing development-centred care means we reduce stimuli as much as we can and we look at what your baby can handle.

Cooperation between parents

As partners, you likely know each other inside out, but you are now taking on a whole new role. With your baby's arrival,

cooperation is more important than ever, which can sometimes present a challenge. Parenthood triggers all kinds of new emotions, and it is important that you keep talking about these feelings with each other. You may have different expectations of the baby, or you might expect different things from one another.

Single parents

Being single and being responsible for a baby all by yourself can be an overwhelming feeling. Make sure to talk to those around you if you need support. A little help with housekeeping, food shopping or even just a little distraction can help you through a difficult day. Taking good care of yourself is also essential; try to eat healthily and get plenty of rest.

The first few days

Keep your baby as close to you as possible to help you get to know his body language faster. Cuddling allows you to smell your baby and feel his heartbeat. Your baby will let you know if he wants to eat, cuddle or sleep. He will feel happiest if you respond to these cues.

Hungry or tired?

Babies are not born with an instruction manual, but they usually make it pretty clear what they need. One thing you will need to learn is the difference between hunger cues and tiredness cues.

Hungry

When your newborn baby is hungry, he will tell you through the following cues:

- Restlessness
- Rooting and sucking movements, turning his head
- Moving his arms and bringing his hands towards his face
- Sucking his hands
- Smacking sounds

- Opening his mouth when you touch his lips

Tired

When your newborn baby wants to sleep, he will most likely show you as follows:

- Staring or looking away
- Grimacing
- Moving his arms or legs intensively
- Clenching his fists
- Whining or crying.

It can sometimes be difficult to differentiate between these cues. For example, when babies show rooting behaviour after a long feeding session, this is often a sign of tiredness instead of hunger.

Difficulty sleeping

Some babies sleep more easily and for longer than others. If your baby has difficulty sleeping, the first thing to check is if there are too many stimuli keeping him awake. For example, a mobile in his cot (for babies younger than three months) or too many sounds in the living room might be keeping him awake.

After the first two weeks, your baby will become more alert and will sometimes be more restless. Try to adapt your life to your baby's rhythm. Restless babies need a quiet sleeping space and can benefit from being tucked in tightly while sleeping. This is called swaddling.

During the first few weeks, babies will be awake for around 45 minutes between feeds. When they get to three months, this will be up to 90 minutes. Rituals can help, so make sure you stick to a set daily pattern. Your baby only starts needing to play instead of moving between feeding/cuddling and sleeping after around six weeks.

Night feeding and rooming in

Night feeding is part of looking after a baby during the early days and has a specific function: if you are breastfeeding, night feeding boosts your milk production. Some babies will be able to go without food or being close to their parents more quickly than others. By having your baby sleep in a separate bed in your room (rooming in), you can respond to his cues more quickly. The Safe Sleeping Foundation recommends rooming in for the first six months as a minimum.

Finding your rhythm

Looking after a baby can be challenging, but it will start to get easier after a few weeks, as you get to know your baby better and better. You will find your own rhythm eventually, but you still need to bear in mind that babies are growing and developing, and that the rhythm might change during different stages of their early life. Try to be flexible and make sure to pay attention to your baby instead of the clock.

What if your baby cries a lot?

Some babies cry more than others, and some parents respond differently to crying than others. A crying baby can leave you feeling confused, as can all the advice from the people around you.

What is normal? A baby cries for around an hour to 90 minutes every day. Around the six-week mark, crying often reaches a peak of two to two and a half hours a day. No one knows exactly why babies cry, and not all babies start crying less as time goes on. Your baby may be particularly restless in the evening and the early hours of the night.

What can you do when your baby is crying?

- Soothe your baby by picking him up and holding him in a comforting position
- Try to recognise your baby's cues
- Tuck your baby in tightly
- Use a sling
- Try massaging your baby

If you are worried about your baby's physical condition, contact your GP.

Your baby's development

During the first few months, your baby will develop quickly. Babies grow in height and weight and learn how to control their eye muscles and balance their head so they can start grabbing. Babies respond to smells and voices. After a few months, your baby will start to move and play more. Parents can consult a child health clinic about normal development. One thing to bear in mind is that all babies have their own rhythm and develop at their own pace.

Any questions?

If you have any questions after reading this brochure, feel free to ask the nurse on you or your baby's ward. You can also call the lactation consultant at Máxima Medical Centre on +31 40 888 84 42.

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The information in this leaflet is of a general nature and is meant to give you an idea of the care and information that you can expect. Other advice or procedures may apply depending on your situation. This brochure is only an addition to the specific information from your specialist or practitioner.