

fact sheet

LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF AS A NEW DAD



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Fatherhood can feel relentless. The demands of taking care of a young family never stop, but in tandem with that you've also got to potentially stay afloat at work. In order to withstand those twin pressures, it pays off to pay extra attention to your self-care routines.

Like with aeroplane safety protocol recommending you don your own oxygen mask in an emergency before attending to your kids, if you're not looking after yourself, you can't adequately look after anyone else.

Use these self-care tips to boost your resilience and stay physically and mentally on track.

1. KEEP ON MOVING

A study in the journal *Social Science & Medicine* found that young men who become fathers drop an average of five hours of exercise per week <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0277953611005120?via%3Dihub> That's hardly surprising when you're suddenly so time-poor but maintaining some form of physical activity will help you feel better in body and mind. It releases neurochemicals that help improve mood and are protective against perinatal depression and anxiety.

You don't have to become a gym junkie or train for a marathon. Do anything that gets your heart rate up even if it's just getting off the train one stop earlier and having 10 more minutes to walk home.

2. GET SLEEP SMART

Boring but true: you need to start prioritising your sleep. As a new dad, you can't control how many times your baby wakes up during the night. What you can try is to get to bed a bit earlier to make up for the inevitable disturbances to come. Even if that means only watching one episode of your favourite TV series.

We always recommend communicating with your partner about what she/he needs too and work it out together.

Sometimes catching up on the weekends can help. Even just lying down and giving your body the opportunity to rest for a 45-minute window is restorative.

3. UPGRADE YOUR FUEL

When sleep-deprived you're already running close to empty. That's why it's doubly important to ensure that you're powered up on quality fuel. If your energy is

already depleted because of sleep disturbances and then you're not feeding yourself with nutritious foods, then you're just draining the tank even further.

Staying properly hydrated and eating plenty of fruit and vegetables can help offset some of the negative impact of sleep loss. It's a way of protecting yourself from ill-health and giving yourself a bit more energy.

4. STAY CONNECTED

Fatherhood can prove socially isolating. A survey from the Movember Foundation found that one in five men lost close friends within a year of becoming a dad. Spending time with your mates is an effective way to decompress and protect your mental wellbeing, so see how you can fit some of this in.

Think about what you can do that's going to lift spirits a little bit and also increase connection? In addition, you might start up a WhatsApp group with your mates who are dads.

5. KEEP TALKING

The first months of dad life can prove exhausting, stressful and difficult at times. But how do you know if you're just experiencing the usual rigmarole of early fatherhood or suffering from perinatal depression and anxiety? If you're not getting enjoyment out of the things you normally would be, that can be a warning sign as well as mood shifts, irritability and withdrawing from life.

But whether you're struggling a lot or just a little – it's vital to open up and share your concerns. You could discuss it with your partner, talk to your mates or even broach the subject with your GP. At any point you can ask for help. 🌸

There are many support services available:

Gidget Foundation Australia

<https://gidgetfoundation.org.au/>

Beyond Blue

<https://healthyfamilies.beyondblue.org.au/pregnancy-and-new-parents/new-dads>

PANDA <https://www.howisdadgoing.org.au>



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Gidget Foundation Australia exists to support the emotional wellbeing of expectant and new parents to ensure they receive timely, appropriate and specialist care.