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Lifecycle

A new beginning. Motherhood Taking time for yourself.

By MARIE F. GUEDENET, M.S.W.

Being a new mother is always an overwhelming experience.

In addition to hormonal and physical changes, the young mother is subject to a jumble of emotions, including exhaustion, excitement, frustration, worry and elation. She is also sleep-deprived.

At times she feels disappointments, doubts and fears about herself. (Am I a good mother? Am I going to be a good mother?). Anxiety about the baby's welfare as well as resentment at the change in lifestyle are common.

A touch of the "baby blues" is normal. About 80 percent of new mothers experience it, and it usually lasts from a few days to a few weeks. Postpartum depression is more serious. It can last up to a year and needs to receive professional treatment.

As in any life transition, there is a feeling of loss. It is perfectly normal for a young mother to grieve about the life she had before the baby. She is going to miss parts of it. It also marks a new beginning as a change occurs in the mother's identity at work, with her partner, with her friends and with society in general.

First-time mothers go from girlhood to motherhood. With many, there is an identity struggle in adapting to motherhood. Some women feel a strong need to have a personal identity beyond their role as moms.

What do new mothers need to do?

First, they need to take care of themselves. Some ways young mothers can do this include:

- Take naps with the baby to reduce sleep deprivation.
- Make time for themselves - get their hair and nails done, take a hot bath, etc.
- Spend time with their partners.
- Get help from immediate family members. If that's not possible, seek help from friends or a support group. Don't be afraid to focus on your own needs. Women, and mothers in particular, often do not consider their own needs until the end of the day when everyone else is taken care of.

It's important to release the illusion of being the perfect mother, of doing it all. As a new mother, seek ways to find your own worth and honor your true self. Otherwise, you will feel resentment.

Is it best to be a stay-home mom or a working mom? That must be the mother's decision.

A happy mother makes the best mother!

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