



## How can new Fathers get involved?

**More and more fathers today enjoy getting involved with looking after their babies. This is good for you and for your baby because:**

- Children whose fathers are very involved from the beginning reach development milestones earlier, make better friendships, do better at school, are less likely to get into trouble as teenagers, and develop higher IQs
- Nature hasn't given women special skills. The average new mother, like the average new father, finds it awkward to work with a new baby at the start. When both parents learn together, they can truly support each other and operate as a team. Everyone is happier and sex and relationships are better, too
- When babies and children are close to their fathers, they tend to be better connected with their mothers: it's a win/win for both parents

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**For additional fact sheets see [www.ihv.org.uk](http://www.ihv.org.uk)**

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The Start4Life Information Service for Parents provides free information and advice. Find out more at: [bit.ly/1iC4rrO](http://bit.ly/1iC4rrO)

## How can new Fathers get involved?

- To make the most of those early weeks, hold that baby close! Cuddling, changing, burping... all that hands-on stuff changes fathers' bodies to make them into more effective dads, increasing levels of hormones including oxytocin (which helps build tolerance and trust) and prolactin. High prolactin helps fathers (and mothers) respond more positively to babies' upsets.
- Make the most of every 5 minutes. Don't only hold your baby so your partner can eat – enjoy having time with your baby in cafes, when watching TV, or going out for a walk together, for example. Unless you make time to do this, mothers end up doing more with their little ones, and fathers can miss out on simple opportunities to spend time with their children.
- Communicate - it's never too early to start! Talking to and gazing at your baby, screwing up your face and waiting for a response (babies just a few days old can mimic you) - all these things help develop the 'synaptic pathways' in your baby's brain. Later on, this will help develop speaking/ listening skills, reading and writing, and social skills.
- Play your favourite music (although not too loud!) and games like peek-a-boo and 'this little piggy', read together (even tiny babies like to look at books) and make up stories – these are all great ways to interact with your little one.
- Playgroups and 'baby clubs' are meant for dads too! Don't be intimidated or worry that your baby's playgroup is exclusively for women. Remember also that more fathers are likely to turn up or stay if you are seen at a group regularly. Here are some things to bear in mind if you're feeling nervous about taking your baby to a local group:
  - Try to find a group that wants to include fathers
  - Think of the other adults present as parents, not mothers
  - If you feel shut out, don't assume it's because you're a man. It takes time to be accepted by any group and most mothers feel awkward attending their first group, too
- Be friendly, polite and positive
- Stick it out - it will be worth it!
- Make sure your name is on your baby's birth certificate and that you've met your Health Visitor, the Breastfeeding Counsellor and your GP, so you can contact them if you need to.
- Your Health Visitor will help you keep track of your baby's development, including a 'new baby review' after 14 days, a second full review by the time your child is 1 year old and a third one between the ages of 2 and 2 1/2. Try to attend these appointments if you can: you and your baby's mother may ask different questions, and when you're given advice and info, you may pick up on things your partner misses.

### More information:

Sign up to the NHS Start4Life Information Service for Parents for regular emails, text messages and useful videos:  
[bit.ly/1nqXFGP](http://bit.ly/1nqXFGP)

You can share experiences with other fathers on the Fatherhood Institute's Facebook and Twitter pages:  
[on.fb.me/1wdd9oE](https://on.fb.me/1wdd9oE) and  
[twitter.com/fatherhoodinst](https://twitter.com/fatherhoodinst)  
using the #DadsExcluded hashtag

More information about understanding child development so you don't expect too much or too little from your baby or toddler:  
[1.usa.gov/1p2dZ7O](http://1.usa.gov/1p2dZ7O)