

**Congratulations,
you're gonna
be a Dad!**

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**What's Ahead from A to Z
for First-Time Fathers**

PAUL & PAM PETTIT

Revised and Expanded

 **Kregel**
Publications

Congratulations, You're Gonna Be a Dad! What's Ahead from A to Z for First-Time Fathers

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In loving memory of
Edward R. Pettit
(1936–1994)

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Preface

Why We Wrote This Book

It's been more than ten years since the first edition of this book was released. Since that time we've spoken to countless couples who have been helped by this work. Our initial impetus for writing this birthing primer for dads was confirmed. Lots of young women told us they grew up playing with baby dolls or acting out "family" playtime situations. However, few dads ever tell us they grew up changing diapers on their baby doll or acting out "breastfeeding" with their buddies. For first-time fathers finding out you are going to be a dad can be a scary situation. Know that this book has now encouraged many men just like you. We have received letters and emails from men who tell us this work helped them move from frazzled to confident in their new role. And now our hope is that a whole new generation of expectant fathers will similarly be encouraged to become Dynamic Dads. We thank God for this second edition and trust He will use it to help build healthy families.

Many men who are about to become fathers feel they're on their own. Their fathers may have been physically or emotionally absent, causing what family experts call a "father wound." We all have this father wound to some extent. If you've suffered abuse, neglect, or absence, then your father wound may be a deep and painful one. Or perhaps you've been blessed with an involved, loving dad. No matter

what your dad was like, your own fathering efforts will be affected by his example. If that example was healthy, your own children will be blessed. But if it left something to be desired, you'll need to make a concerted effort to avoid repeating your father's mistakes. Either way, read on. Our message is one of hope! You can stop a cycle of poor fathering or continue to build on a legacy of healthy fathering—it's your decision.

Being a good dad begins by taking an early and active role in your baby's life. This involvement begins with how you treat your wife during pregnancy and will intensify the closer you get to d-day (delivery day). This is no time for fear! This is a job for a real man. A real man helps his wife when her ankles are swollen and her back hurts. A dynamic dad helps his wife through the pain of labor and delivery. Moreover, an engaged father holds his newborn close—very close—and whispers in his little baby's ear, "I'm your daddy, and I love you. You're safe in my arms; I'm going to take care of you."

Being masculine includes changing diapers and warming bottles in the middle of the night. The truly masculine man enters into his newborn's world and explores it with his baby, seeing the world through his baby's eyes.

Expectant dads sometimes think, "I can't get down on my hands and knees and coo and crawl with my baby! I'll feel like a sissy!" That's the kind of thinking that deepens the father wound. Unfortunately, when dads think this way the cycle is perpetuated, and the pain of longing for an involved father continues.

A baby who never receives the touch and attention of a loving dad will go through life wondering, "What's wrong with me?" If you think we're exaggerating, consider this striking statistic: In the first eighteen months of life, gender identity is formed. That's right! Before the first two years have sped by, an infant is able to distinguish the subtle differences between his father's and mother's voices, heartbeats, smell, and even their skin! Before babies can even say "Dada" or "Mama," they've already locked into their brain the

thought *this is Mom* or *this is Dad*. You are genuinely needed from day one. So prepare now to physically and emotionally enter into your newborn's world.

Reading this book is a further step in becoming a dynamic dad. Now, from day one, every chance you get, plan to hold your baby, pray for your baby, read to your baby, talk to your baby, change your baby, and enter into his or her world. Reject passivity! Fight through the father wounds you may have experienced, and lovingly move *toward* your baby—toward your very own generous gift from God. Emotionally healthy men make better fathers. Trust us on that.

Introduction

Why You Should Read This Book

Welcome to the greatest roller coaster ride of your life. Whether you've just discovered you're expecting or are several weeks into the pregnancy, strap yourself in for a bumpy ride of changing emotions and attitudes. At times you'll experience the heights of euphoria and excitement. At other times, different thoughts (*What if something goes wrong? How much is all this going to cost?*) could plunge you into sheer terror. But here's a little secret: This range of emotions is quite normal. In fact, it's expected.

Many men feel threatened by merely thinking of a new baby. While most men feel secure in performing what they know—jobs, household responsibilities, hobbies—how many are adept at quieting a fussy baby or bathing a newborn? Many books address the care of toddlers, and numerous books offer advice to the expectant mother. But this book is for you—the father. It focuses on the delivery and care of your newborn and is written from a father's perspective.

An entire generation of fathers stood alone in a waiting room or hallway while their sons and daughters were born. And we're certain many of you have not sat with your father or an older man to ask all the various questions on your mind: Will my wife begin to totally ignore me? What will happen to our sex life? Am I capable of

attending to the needs of an infant? Will I be able to provide financially for my growing family?

This book addresses such questions with frank, direct answers. And it offers encouragement to you, the new dad. It is arranged alphabetically by topic and is interspersed with articles authored by well-known—and not-so-well-known—fathers. You'll be encouraged as you read these stories. Think of them as advice from experienced dads to one just learning the ropes—you.

Refer to this book as questions arise during pregnancy, delivery, and as your baby grows. Some information is of a medical nature, some is humorous, and some will prompt you to take specific steps to prepare for d-day (delivery day). Part of the advice is just plain common sense, confirming your gut feelings. Always consult your obstetrician-gynecologist (ob-gyn)—or pediatrician, once the baby arrives—if you have serious medical questions. There is no such thing as a dumb question. Although a plethora of medical advice is available in books and on the Internet, we still strongly encourage you to ask your specific questions of your own physician.

Why has God blessed you with a baby? Because He knows you can handle the job. The gift of fatherhood helps you become more and more the man He wants you to become. Being a father means you are growing in patience, servanthood, boldness, character, and a host of other virtues. At times you'll look heavenward and wonder, "Why did You give me this baby?" Whether that question arises out of pleasure or pain, the answer will be the same: "Because I love you, and I want you to experience all that being a father entails."

We trust this book will encourage you as you learn how millions of men before you have survived the expectant-dad roller coaster ride. So step in line and strap yourself in. Congratulations, you're gonna be a dad!

Pregnancy Timeline

0–4 weeks

Pregnancy lasts approximately forty weeks. It's best to wait until the end of the first trimester (third month of pregnancy) to announce the impending birth. At that stage, the chance of a miscarriage decreases. Until then, enjoy the secret the two of you share. Now that your doctor has confirmed your good news, your wife should avoid hot baths, alcohol, cigarette smoke, caffeine, and heavy lifting. While she should also avoid taking over-the-counter medications, your doctor will most likely prescribe prenatal vitamins. Your wife may also begin to feel morning sickness around this time. You should be extra sensitive to her nausea and offer help and comfort.

5–8 weeks

Now's the time to start planning your calendar. You and your wife should discuss work-related concerns—time off, vacations, maternity leave, and insurance. This is also a great time to shop for baby items and room decorations, before it becomes uncomfortable for your wife.

During a doctor's appointment in the coming weeks, you may be provided an opportunity to hear your baby's heartbeat. The end of the third month is the official end of the first trimester, at which point many women report their morning sickness diminishes. Others remain nauseous off and on throughout. During the coming months, support your wife with walks, visits to the doctor, back massages, and general encouragement.

Word of your impending arrival will soon begin to spread. Talking with experienced parents and grandparents can lessen fear of the unknown.

9–12 weeks

If you are planning to take a pre-birth class, now is the time to enroll. Many local hospitals and community agencies offer helpful, fun classes that meet for a few weeks. At this time, your doctor may perform certain tests to check on the health of your baby. Your wife may begin to show, and her body will change shape. Her breasts will probably become larger, and her tummy may be expanding. Now is not the time for wisecracks regarding her figure! By the end of the third month, your baby is approximately two inches long and weighs about an ounce.

12–14 weeks

At this time, consider names and housing situations. Do you need to replace your sports car with a minivan? Be prepared for a variety of emotions during this stage. If your wife is feeling up and happy one day and down and fearful the next, she has a perfectly fine case of the normals.

Now is not the time to clam up. Be sure to talk with her during this time. You and your wife should be experiencing this pregnancy *together*. Many men begin to work harder during the pregnancy, feeling that they need to provide financially for their new family. But your long hours at the office or worksite can frustrate your wife, who may feel she is going through the ordeal alone. Stand by her side.

14–16 weeks

Tests, tests, and more tests. This is the time when some important screens are performed to check on the health of your baby. Two of the most common are the maternal serum alpha-fetoprotein (MSAFP)

screening and the multiple marker test. Your doctor is checking for problems such as spina-bifida and high sugar levels. Be patient. The results of these tests normally take a few days, and waiting can be difficult. Assure your wife that no matter the results, you are going through the pregnancy and birth as a committed team. Your baby is still small enough at this stage to fit into the palm of your hand, yet he or she is sensitive to light and sounds and even gets the hiccups!

17–20 weeks

You're almost halfway to d-day! Mom may be feeling the baby move. Your wife's body is really changing now. Because her stomach is being pressed upward, she may experience heartburn as well as an aching back almost daily. If you wonder why, imagine what it would be like to reduce the size of your stomach by half, strap ten to twenty pounds onto your gut, and then walk around like that *all day*. If you haven't already done so, take on more of the household chores. Bending and lifting are proving to be uncomfortable if not difficult for your wife. It's common, too, for moms to experience constipation and swollen ankles at this stage.

Also, if you haven't done so, tell your supervisor and coworkers about your future work schedule. Nowadays it is normal for a new dad to take time off for delivery, recovery, and settling the baby into the home. While almost all moms will take maternity leave, more and more new dads are taking paternity leave. Yes, it's *that* important.

21–24 weeks

Does your wife mention how tired she is all the time? She's not joking. The baby is literally pulling iron, minerals, and blood from her body. And her expanding uterus is pushing up against her lungs, so she may be out of breath after even a short walk. Since Baby is relying heavily on Mom's diet, you can help her out by eating healthy as well. Practice skipping the fast food and eat more vegetables, fruits, and protein-rich foods. Your baby is now approximately eight inches

long and weighs about a pound. Dad, are you praying for your wife, the delivery, and the arrival of your new son or daughter?

25–28 weeks

Someone may give a shower party for the baby. Put off buying too much baby equipment, because others may give you these items as gifts. Week twenty-seven is the last week your wife should travel by air without approval from your doctor. Your wife will now want to eat several small meals throughout the day as opposed to three full meals. And she will want to stand and stretch throughout the day and evening. For more comfortable sleeping, she may want to surround herself with several large, soft pillows. You may begin to practice breathing and relaxation exercises at this point. You can also now discover the sex of your baby.

29–32 weeks

Start planning some of the details for your trip to the hospital. Have you received or purchased an infant car seat yet? You can't leave the hospital without one. Have you considered having someone in the delivery room with you? Whom do you want? What do you want the environment to be? Celebrative? Reflective? Many of the choices are up to you. As a supportive husband, you may at this time increase the back rubs, trips to purchase frozen yogurt, and extra efforts at household chores. Are your cell phone and/or video camera ready to roll if you desire to use them?

33–36 weeks

Your baby can now arrive at any moment. Your wife will begin to experience Braxton-Hicks, or involuntary muscle contractions in the tummy, pelvic, and back region. It's time now to purchase infant diapers, baby shampoo, lotions, and basic baby supplies. Your wife may want to purchase a nursing bra. Have you planned for someone to help in the home in the days following the delivery? Do you

want someone to stay at your home? If so, whom? Have you done some advanced food and household shopping? Do you know the best route to the hospital? At this stage, your doctor or hospital may allow you to log into a web-based text or message system that allows you to provide instant access to the delivery room. Focus now on how your life is about to change; for a new dad, there's no turning back now.

37–40 weeks

Most doctors will not allow your baby to progress past the forty-week mark. If you are in the fortieth week, you are probably hours away from delivery. Your wife's amniotic fluid (water) may or may not "break." In the last stages of the fortieth week, your doctor may advise your wife to walk around to "get things going." If things do not progress, your doctor may use medications to stimulate labor. Once you arrive at the hospital, everything happens very quickly. We advise new dads to try to be "fully present." Get into the situation at hand and soak it all in. What time is it? How does your wife look and feel? Has the baby "dropped" into the birth canal? Is it too bright or too loud in the room? Are you feeling weak or strong? Once the heavy labor begins and your baby's head "crowns," there are only a few precious moments until you are fully a new dad. Congratulations! Welcome to fatherhood! Here is a social media security alert: Don't announce, "We're heading to the hospital for a few days. We're so excited!" Unfortunately, this could be an invitation for some unscrupulous characters to break into your home. It's sad but true.

following delivery

At first, your baby may look unusual to you. He or she will probably be wet, wrinkled, and covered with vernix (a wax-like substance) and might not look anything like what you had imagined. Don't put off moving toward your baby. Begin to bond this instant, not a year or

two from now. Hold your baby, talk to him or her, and look into your baby's eyes.

Activity around the home will be hectic for a few days, but don't let that keep you from your baby. Spend time holding and walking with Baby. Don't let the busyness of having visits from friends and relatives keep you from enjoying these first days as a new family. These are moments and days you will never get back. And in the first few days, your baby will change so much. Seemingly overnight, his or her eyes will come into focus, and hand and arm movements will become more coordinated. Everyone will be exhausted, but it will be a good kind of exhaustion. The days and years that stretch out in front of you can be left for someone else to worry about right now. Celebrate the new life God has placed into your life. Smile . . . dance . . . go outside and jump up and down. Go to a restaurant and announce you want "the new dad special." Call an old friend whom you haven't seen in a while and shout into the phone, "My wife and I just had a baby!" Praise the Lord.

Behold, children are a gift of the LORD.

—Psalm 127:3 NASB

A

air travel (*see also vacations*)

Some airlines prohibit travel for Mom after the seventh month of pregnancy. Airlines do a great job of delivering passengers and packages, but they don't specialize in delivering babies. Always consult your doctor regarding any travel—including car, bus, or train trips—in the days and weeks leading up to your due date. After your baby is born, you may desire to take him or her to visit family or friends. When traveling by air, plan ahead to relieve potential pain in your baby's eardrums caused by the pressure changes in the cabin. Always bring something for Baby to suck on—a bottle or pacifier helps relieve the pressure. Long flights are difficult. Some passengers may become annoyed if your baby is fussy. By the end of the flight, you may be the one with the pacifier in your mouth.

announcements (*see also welcome, yard sign*)

Many couples send or post birth announcements for family and friends, sharing the good news. Items to include are date and time of birth; Baby's birth weight and length; Mother's condition; description of Baby; and any other notes you deem newsworthy, such as a brief account of the events leading up to and surrounding the delivery. Be creative. You could send a picture or include a favorite verse of Scripture. When you state your baby's full name, it's fun for readers to

know why you chose a particular one, so the definition of an unusual name or the family connection of a middle name can be included.

anomaly

This word is used by the medical community when referring to a problem or abnormality during pregnancy. Some problems are minor and require little attention. Others are treatable with medicine or bed rest. The worst tragedy possible would be losing your baby or wife during the pregnancy or delivery. Some anomalies can be diagnosed early during a routine sonogram or ultrasound. A problem can, however, go undetected until the actual delivery. You must be as mentally and physically prepared as possible to deal with any complications that arise.

Someone may ask how a good and loving God could allow a tragedy to occur. The fact is, no one knows why God allows us to experience heartbreaking circumstances. Trust that God will give you comfort and strength. He never gives us more than we can handle. Remember, He has promised us, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified . . . for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you" (Deut. 31:6). Isn't that a great promise!

Apgar score

Dr. Virginia Apgar created an assessment tool for newborns. Using her last name as an acronym, she developed a scale for the following categories:

- A–Appearance (color)
- P–Pulse (heartbeat)
- G–Grimace (reflex irritability)
- A–Activity (muscle tone)
- R–Respiration (breathing)

Since you may be wondering how your newborn is really doing, ask a nurse or doctor, "What was the Apgar score?" The baby will be

scored at one minute and five minutes after birth. A score of seven or above will let you know your baby is doing great. A score of four or below means your baby may need special attention from the medical staff. In addition, you'll make yourself appear really knowledgeable. The nurses in the hallway will say, "The dad in room 117 asked for his son's Apgar score! He really knows his stuff!"

areola

Your wife's body is going through enormous hormonal and physical changes. Her breasts are becoming larger, and the ring surrounding the nipple, the areola, is becoming darker. Veins will appear due to the increase in circulation required for breastfeeding. Most women report that their breasts are tender, even painful to the touch. When breastfeeding is done properly, your baby will take much of the areola into his or her mouth.

attitude

Be honest with yourself. What is your attitude toward your baby? Do you talk to the baby in the womb? Are you afraid your wife will give all of her attention to the baby to the point of ignoring you and your needs? Are you fearful of what may happen in the delivery room? During your prayer time, be brutally honest with God regarding any inadequacies you are feeling. Talk with your wife about these concerns.

You may want to seek the advice of your pastor, father, or another man who has wrestled with some of these same concerns. Seek out a man who has witnessed a couple of deliveries and ask him to recount his experiences. Spend some time in conversation with an older man who has successfully raised a few children.

Know that the attitude you bring into the delivery room will have a big impact on your wife. Your role is coach, comforter, and encourager. You will need to be strong for her if she becomes physically weak or emotionally fragile.

The quote below from Chuck Swindoll is known as simply “the attitude quote.” You may have seen it on T-shirts, posters, restaurant menus, coffee mugs, or key chains. Read it slowly and deliberately, and consider: What is your attitude toward your upcoming role as father?

Words can never adequately convey the incredible impact of our attitude toward life. The longer I live the more convinced I become that life is 10 percent what happens to us and 90 percent how we respond to it.

I believe the single most significant decision I can make on a day-to-day basis is my choice of attitude. It is more important than my past, my education, my bankroll, my successes or failures, fame or pain, what other people think of me or say about me, my circumstances, or my position. Attitude keeps me going or cripples my progress. . . . It alone fuels my fire or assaults my hope. When my attitude is right, there's no barrier too high, no valley too deep, no dream too extreme, no challenge too great for me.

(Taken from *Strengthening Your Grip* by Charles R. Swindoll, copyright 1982, Charles R. Swindoll. Used by permission of W Publishing Group, Inc., Nashville, Tennessee.)

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Bassinets, Beached Whales, and Braxton-Hicks

Charlie Dyer

Thoughts on the birth of a child were etched in black and white . . . and came straight from the original *Dick Van Dyke Show*: Laura, stylish with a small pillow around the waist to simulate pregnancy, calls calmly to her husband; Rob leaps from bed, fully dressed in his rumpled suit, shouting,

“Oh my goodness, it’s time!” Mysteriously, Laura somehow just “knew” when it was time to head to the hospital, and Rob only had to keep from coming apart at the seams as he waited in nervous anticipation.

Then the time approached for my wife to give birth to our son . . . and I learned what television neglects to tell us!

Bassinets

For most men, shopping is a necessary evil. We know that a baby will require some new equipment, but usually we don’t have a clue as to what it is. And we don’t want to waste our weekends wandering through aisles of bassinets, cribs, and strollers.

I soon learned, however, about the “nesting instinct.” It kicks in at some point during pregnancy, and it will become vitally important for your wife to have a place prepared for her first child. And you need to be involved, because it assures her that you care for her and that you are concerned about her needs. So smile, don’t complain, and prepare yourself for the fascinating world of baby furniture.

Beached Whales

One major difference between pregnancy on the *Dick Van Dyke Show* and pregnancy in real life is the self-perception of the mother-to-be. On the show, Laura looked stylishly plump in her designer clothes, perfectly coifed hair, and matching shoes. In reality, most women in their final months of pregnancy feel more like Moby Dick than Laura Petrie. They are so uncomfortable that they are willing to go through just about anything to unload the sack of potatoes around their waist that keeps kicking them in the ribs.

Your wife may not feel attractive or desirable during her final trimester, so make sure you are especially sensitive

during this time. Here's a list of dos and don'ts for the average male.

| Do | Don't |
|---|--|
| Offer to rub her legs, back, or neck when she gets a cramp or is in pain. | Make any references to Moby Dick or the Goodyear blimp. |
| Help her turn over in bed and scratch in places she can no longer reach. | Complain if she no longer has the energy to do everything she could do before. |
| Tell her you love her and think she is beautiful. | Compare her to others and say, "Well at least you're not as fat as _____!" |
| Let her place your hand on her stomach to feel the baby kick. | Be grumpy if she decides to deliver at 3 AM. |

The list could go on, but I think you get my point. Your wife may not feel too special or physically attractive as the time for the birth approaches. Let her know through your words and your deeds that you think she's special.

Braxton-Hicks

On the television show, Laura says to her husband, "Rob, it's time," and off they go to the hospital to have their baby. Real life bears no resemblance to television. The watchword during our final few weeks of pregnancy was Braxton-Hicks, often called false labor.

Your fear is, of course, that somehow your wife will go into labor and you won't make it to the hospital on time. Your recurring nightmare has you delivering the baby on the side of the highway . . . with rush hour traffic crawling by . . . and the traffic helicopter hovering overhead broadcasting

pictures of the event. (Okay, so this might not be your recurring nightmare, but I'll bet you're still concerned about getting to the hospital on time.)

When contractions first begin, your wife has no way of knowing whether or not she is experiencing Braxton-Hicks contractions or the "real thing." This can be stressful for her and for you, but your reaction can add to her stress or help to alleviate it. Don't panic. Don't get upset. Don't expect her to be able to tell you whether it's false labor. The best thing you can do is be calm and reassuring, and start timing the frequency and duration of the contractions. If there's any question, call your doctor.

If it turns out to be Braxton-Hicks, don't get upset with your wife for waking you up in the middle of the night . . . or having you miss part of the game of the week on television . . . or making you leave work just before an important meeting with your boss. She can't tell whether it will be false labor or the real thing, and you don't want her to be unwilling to share with you what is happening. Recognize that this is going to happen, and roll with the punches.

The approaching birth of your child is a time of insecurity, uncertainty, and unexpected interruptions. Your wife will be looking to you for comfort, help, and encouragement. Make a commitment now to be the support she needs. You will never regret it!

Dr. Charlie Dyer is professor-at-large of Bible at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Illinois, and serves as the host of the radio program The Land and the Book.