



FACTSHEET

Resources for families

Supporting your child's health

Smoking

You already know smoking is bad for you – and becoming a dad is the perfect opportunity to do what you know is right, and give up.

Smoking even has an impact before you become a dad, causing sperm damage, reducing semen quality and diminishing responsiveness to fertility treatment.

If you're a heavy smoker, this is even associated with increased risk of early pregnancy loss, respiratory disease in infants and low birth-weight. And it's linked directly to sudden infant death syndrome - where both parents smoke, the baby is eight times more likely to die of SIDS.

Studies have also found associations between fathers' smoking and fussiness/colic in newborns and increased risk of childhood leukaemia.

It's also important to remember that if you continue to smoke, your partner is more likely to continue to smoke – so you could be contributing to a seriously unhealthy environment for your growing baby.

And if you're still a smoker as your child gets older, you'll be making it more likely that he or she themselves becomes a smoker.

So giving up really is a no-brainer. For effective help with quitting, call the NHS helpline on 0800 848484 or visit the [Smoke-Free website](#).

Alcohol and drugs

Heavy drinking and drug use not only exposes your child to physical danger – you can't look after them properly when you're out of it – but it also damages your relationship with them...and the mother's too, even if she doesn't drink or take drugs herself.

Becoming a dad is the wake-up call that allows many alcoholics and drug users to turn the corner and give up. For help, talk to your GP or one of the national support groups:

[Alcoholics Anonymous](#) (0845 769 7555); [Talk to Frank](#) (0800 776 600); [Drug Scope](#); and [Narcotics Anonymous in the UK](#).

Breastfeeding

It's easy to think of breastfeeding as a 'mum-only' responsibility – she's the one with breasts, after all - but in fact, you have a really important role to play.

Research shows that by actively participating in the initial decision to breastfeed, maintaining a positive attitude and developing good knowledge and understanding about breastfeeding's benefits, you can really help your child's mum stick with it.

Just in case you're not sure why that's a good thing – breastfed babies are healthier, less likely to become obese, and may even do better at school. Breastfeeding is also good for mum's health and offers great bonding time with the baby. And it's free – saving you around £500 a year on the cost of formula milk.

Some people say breastfeeding shuts the dad out, because you can't do the feeding – but once it's properly established mum can use a breast pump to express her milk, giving you the opportunity to take charge sometimes.

For useful information visit [Best Beginnings](#) or contact the National Breastfeeding Helpline on 0300 100 0212 – and remember, once the baby's ready for solid food (at around 6 months) you can pitch in even more.

Child safety

There are lots of things you can do to cut the risk of your baby coming to harm. One is to minimise the risk of cot death by swotting up on the risk factors and doing all you can to avoid them – visit [NHS website](#) and look for 'sudden infant death syndrome' in the Health A-Z section.

Another is to be prepared for the time – and it will come – when you're up in the middle of the night at the point of despair with a baby who won't stop screaming no matter what you do. Baby-shaking is a killer and often occurs around six weeks after the birth – a peak time for babies' crying. If you feel you're reaching the end of your tether, put your baby somewhere safe (on their back in their cot, for example) and get out of ear-shot until you've calmed down.

If your baby gets ill, visit [NHS](#) or [NHS inform - Scotland's health information service](#), call NHS Direct on 0845 4647 or go to your GP or local NHS walk-in centre. For serious conditions go to your nearest A&E and in life-threatening situations call 999.

Why not think about doing some first-aid training? Dads have saved their children's lives... courses are available from [St John's Ambulance](#) or the [Red Cross](#).

For help and support if you have a sick or premature baby, contact [Bliss](#) (0500 618 140). If your child has a disability, [Contact a Family](#) can help (0808 808 3555).

Mental health

Having babies is off-the-chart stressful. Many mums and dads struggle to cope, and some (perhaps as many as 15% of mums and 10% of dads) experience serious mental health issues as a result.

There are various factors behind a mother's post-natal depression, including stuff you can control – for example whether or not you're available at the time of the birth, and how much emotional or practical support you provide.

In fact, your role as a support person is key, since depressed new mothers are more likely to turn to and receive support from their partner than from any other individual, including medical staff. Positively involved dads can also ameliorate the impact of mothers' depression on infants.

There is relatively little research on new fathers' depression. What studies we do have suggest that some new dads do experience depression both before and after the birth, with the peak time being between three and six months afterwards.

Mothers' and fathers' depression are linked, and both have negative effects on children. So it's important to spot depression early on and nip it in the bud. Be wary of 'self-medicating' with drink or drugs, or burying yourself in work. For help, talk to your GP or visit [CALM](#).

Healthy eating and exercise

The old adage 'you are what you eat' has never been more accurate than when used of future dads. Nutrition has a direct impact on the quality and quantity of your sperm, and therefore on your chances of siring a healthy child (bear in mind that 32% of infertility problems can be traced to men).

For example zinc, folates (such as green leafy vegetables) and other foods rich in antioxidants, such as vitamin C, help your body to make normal functioning sperm and to kill off abnormal sperm. Don't overdo it though – too much zinc can reduce sperm mobility. Great sources of zinc include extra-lean minced beef, baked beans and dark chicken meat. Foods rich in folates include green vegetables, such as broccoli and sprouts, but it can also be found in other foods such as black eyed beans, papaya, and jacket potatoes. Orange juice is a convenient source of vitamin C.

Once you've become a dad, try to keep up with the healthy eating for your own sake but also because you'll be setting a good example for your child. If you need help thinking about what a healthy diet looks like, take a look at these useful websites:

- [Live Well](#)
- [5 a day](#)

On a similar note, why not take the opportunity to get exercising? Regular aerobic exercise (no less than three times a week) can help to raise mood – great for helping you and your

child's mum to cope with your new life at your baby's beck and call! Once she can express milk, encourage her to go for regular runs, swims or gym sessions – and look after the baby while she does. Sort out your own exercise plan at the same time.

For great ideas on nutrition, visit [Eat Better Feel Better](#).

Prepared by Jeremy Davies of the Fatherhood Institute

More resources for employers, service providers and families are available at:

www.yearofthedad.org

Twitter: [@yearofthedad](#) hashtag: [#yearofthedad](#)

Facebook: www.facebook.com/yearofthedad

YouTube: www.youtube.com/user/FathersNetScot

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