

## Supporting new moms, part one

Bringing a baby home from the hospital is one of the most stressful, but exciting things a couple can experience. Rightfully so, much of the focus in the first few weeks and months is on the child. Are they eating properly? Is their onesie comfortable? How much crying is too much?

But Xandra Anderson, BS, IBCLC, an international board-certified lactation consultant at OSF HealthCare, says: Don't forget about mom's needs, as this is a delicate time for her too. Anderson has some tips that partners, friends and family members can take note of.

- Have a conversation *before* the baby arrives about what mom's needs are. Your idea of support might not line up with hers, it might be outdated or mom might need something you're not able to do.

"The conversation needs to be very mom-focused and validating," Anderson says. "This is a new experience. You're going from a family of two to a family of three. Ask: What are your expectations? How do you feel like we can support you?"

For example, Anderson says a new mom might complain of cramping and just want to be heard, rather than be given a solution or hard truth (like, take a pill or use a heating pad) right away.

- Set realistic, simple goals. As much as mom might want her postpartum headache or stomachache to go away entirely, it might not be possible, leaving mom feeling disheartened.

Instead, try: "I want to feed the baby before they get fussy. I want to make sure I get a 20-minute nap when baby naps," Anderson suggests. "Be realistic. For example, babies are not going to sleep through the night. So your goal cannot be to get a restful night's sleep. That's just not reality."

Other common, achievable goals: I want to drink three bottles of water per day. I know I'm busy in the morning, but I want to commit to eating *something* for breakfast. I want 15 minutes per day to enjoy a hobby. Or, dad can set a goal to always be the one to fold the laundry so mom gets a break from one task.

For infant feeding: "Make the goal simply: I want to feed my baby," Anderson implores. "It doesn't have to be 'I need to feed my baby, pump breastmilk, sleep and wash all the bottles.' Feeding is your only job, and your baby's only job is to eat."

- Stay well fed, well hydrated and well rested. This goes without saying, but it can get lost in the never-ending task of child care. Keep a drink and a snack bag within arm's reach as often as possible. Those snacks can be a sweet or salty treat in moderation, Anderson says. Or, look for one-handed foods like wraps that you can eat while feeding your baby. Try making this one of the simple tasks for a friend or mother-in-law. Put them in charge of the "snack station" in several rooms of your home.

For sleep, Anderson simply says with a smile, "Do your best."

"Everyone says to sleep when the baby sleeps, but there are some parents that have anxiety that stops them from doing that," Anderson says. "If you can't sleep, just rest. Turn devices off. Turn noises down."

This is another time you can tap into your support system, Anderson says. While you rest, see if someone can wash the dishes or put away the laundry.

### **The bottom line: Give yourself grace**

Above all else, Anderson wants new parents to remember: Parenting is tough. Cut yourself some slack when things aren't perfect.

### **Learn more**

Read more about having a successful pregnancy and birth on the [OSF HealthCare website](#). Pregnancy care at OSF includes new parent classes taught by people like Anderson on the [local level](#).