

7 Hacks All First-Time Moms Should Know

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My oldest daughter just turned 8 years old this week. Thinking back on the first-time mother I was eight years ago has made me realize that there are plenty of things I wish I had known.

I think that every mother has to go through her own learning curve as she becomes a parent. In some ways, it's essential to make mistakes along the way. But one of the most important lessons that any first-time mom can learn is that it never hurts to have some help.

Here are a few hacks that I wish I would have known as a first-time mom. These hacks might just help you survive your start to motherhood with a little more finesse.

1. You can say 'no' to visitors



It really is OK to say no to visitors after giving birth. You may be tempted to feel like you need to let every great aunt, cousin, and someone you're pretty sure you worked with once come over. But the most important thing after you have a baby is to make sure you and your baby are healthy.

You can deal with hurt feelings later, if necessary. But anyone who is close enough to care for you and your baby will completely understand if you need to hold off visitors until you're back on your feet again.

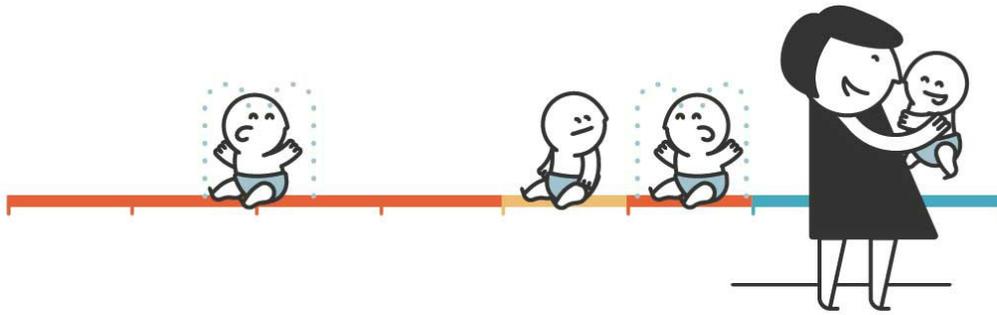
2. The fourth trimester is real



If you haven't heard of the fourth trimester yet, you need to know that it's real. The "fourth trimester" is that in between time for both you and your baby after birth. Neither of you will feel part of the real world yet. You might live in a constant state of exhaustion, colic, and feedings without really even knowing if it's night or day.

But the good news is, the fourth trimester doesn't last forever. Even though you might wonder if you will ever feel like a human being again, I promise you will adjust. Eventually, your baby will learn to sleep.

3. There's no magical timeline for motherhood



Maternity leave might be six weeks or six months long, but like everything with parenting, that is strictly a guideline. There's no hard and fast rule that says you must fit into your pants by six weeks, or that your baby should be sleeping through the night by the time you go back to work.

Parenting doesn't work that way. "There's nothing magical about hitting six weeks postpartum," says mom Molly Pannell. "You might be back to normal, or seminormal, or completely not. It's fine."

4. Learn the "T-Rex" arm



I had an aunt teach me this little hack for breast-feeding. Unfortunately, first-time moms might be surprised to discover that breast-feeding is not a neat and tidy business that you can turn on and off like a milk faucet.

I dealt with constant leaking out of the breast my baby wasn't feeding on, even with nursing pads. Then my aunt taught me the "T-Rex" move. All you have to do is use your arm to apply pressure directly to the nipple until the milk letdown stops. It might make you look a bit like a T-Rex, but it's worth it.

5. Formula isn't evil



This is an important reminder for women who may feel like it's breast-feeding or bust. Every woman has her own reasons for how she chooses to feed her baby. The truth is, that's an individual decision without room for anyone else's opinions. Formula-feeding your baby is nothing to be ashamed of.

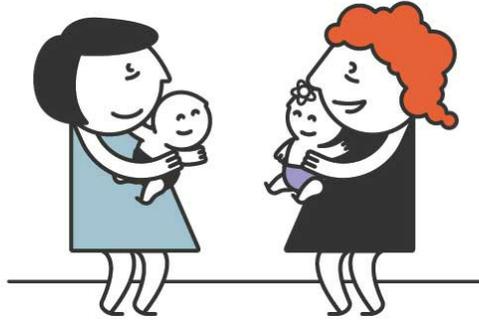
6. Take help when it's offered



Mom Chelsie Cantin urges first-time moms to take that influx of help that usually comes with a new baby. "When people want to offer help, take it, and take a nap," she pleads. "Eventually people stop asking, and you'll wish you had a minute to yourself." There's something exciting about a new baby. People genuinely do love to help first-time mothers. I remember my mother-in-law offering to do my laundry, and I just laughed at how ridiculous that would be. As if I would let her literally air my dirty laundry!

But now, with four kids under 8 at our house, I'm no longer laughing. Bottom line: Take whatever help is offered to you before it's too late.

7. You are not alone



You may think that you are the first mother in the world to never sleep. Or, you may feel like the loneliest person on the planet during yet another 3 a.m. feeding. But the truth is, every mother has felt the same way at some point. And the even bigger truth about motherhood? No one else knows what they're doing, either!

Note: If you think you're experiencing postpartum depression, be sure to speak up. Talk to your doctor. They can refer you to a mental health specialist, if needed.



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