

Bonding With Your Newborn

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Having a baby is a joyful time for most women. In particular, the few moments when a woman first lays eyes on this “little person” they have come to know only through a series of kicks, movements, and blurry ultrasound pictures, it is almost magical. Most new moms get very quiet, speak softly or coo to their newborn, and intently study their baby’s face and little body. The majority of women will look at the face first, touch the fingers, and then touch or look at the toes. As they are doing this, they seem almost oblivious to everyone else in the room (in-laws, nurses, physicians). It is a breathtaking, intimate moment that my profession allows me the opportunity to witness frequently, and I never grow tired of it.

Of course not all mothers have this powerful experience, and some new mothers will have it but perhaps not immediately after their child is born. Additionally, it is important to note that in an ideal situation, the father of the baby will also be in the delivery room and will be bonding with the newborn as well. For some women, these powerful and positive feelings of awe, joy, and unconditional love are also accompanied by less positive emotions in the delivery room. Immediately after childbirth, some mothers feel sad, afraid, angry or anxious. Having mixed emotions in the delivery room (clouded possibly by fatigue or medication), is not unusual at all. These negative emotions in their mild form are often referred to as “baby blues.” The American College of Obstetricians & Gynecologist (ACOG) estimates that 70 – 80 % of women have the baby blues after childbirth. Symptoms are usually mild, inconsistent, and resolve after 2 or 3 days. Common symptoms include depressed mood, anger at family or at the newborn, and feelings of inadequacy to care for the newborn. Some new moms also describe feeling overwhelmed at times and crying “for no reason” during the first few days after giving birth. If a new mom is observed to have a deepening depression, thoughts of hurting the baby or persistence of her symptoms beyond the first week or two after delivery, this could be a sign of a more serious problem and should prompt a call to your doctor.

Bonding well with your newborn baby is largely an instinctive, emotional event. “Bonding” is the answer to the question: “how can I have fallen so

deeply in love with another human being I just met a few minutes ago ?” Well, that “human being” is actually your own flesh and blood and a few minutes ago was actually a part of you. In addition, most moms haven’t just “met” their baby at the time of birth, they have been having a relationship with their unborn child from the moment they found out they were pregnant. I say all this to reassure new moms who may have had a rough start to their bonding to relax ! Rest assured, even if the first few minutes or hours are rocky, you will bond with your baby and love and nurture it for life the way you always imagined. Bonding takes place best between an alert (non-drugged) infant and a healthy mom who has had an uncomplicated labor and delivery. In some instances, after all the commotion of the delivery has died down, your nurse may usher everyone out of the room and leave mom, dad and baby to “visit” with each other and perhaps even breastfeed in a quiet room. In other cases that moment of “connection” may happen several days later. The key is to relax, enjoy this new addition to the family and trust your instincts.

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Previously published in the *Henry County TIMES* Newspaper