

FREE DOWNLOAD

A Helpful Guide to having a

Happy Baby

during a stressful time

Practical wisdom from a maternity nurse
for pregnancy and birth

Fiona Cooke



Introduction

If you are expecting a baby right now, or have a newborn, first of all, let me say "congratulations!"

Whatever else is happening in the world, we should all be celebrating new life. As a maternity nurse, I know how precious and also how sometimes unsettling this period is for all new and prospective parents, and so I have written this small, free guide to give you guidance and ideas.

The current global COVID-19 virus pandemic is an exceedingly worrying time and will have an impact on every one of us in some way, but it might seem particularly scary when you're pregnant or have a tiny infant to care for without all the usual support systems. It might feel like your life has been tipped on its head.

What you are feeling is normal.



Remember:

Anxiety is natural:
it is your instinct
to protect.

Protection will
keep you and your
family safe.

In turn, that
will also keep
others safe.

Try not to panic and try not to waste energy on fear. Protect yourself and make a plan. Keep yourself well informed so you know what to expect, and then try to go with it and relax into this new normal. A lot of parenting is being prepared for the unexpected, so consider this time in your life a crash course in keeping calm under pressure!

Although I can't be hands-on at the moment, I can offer
you my help from afar.

Fiona x

Pregnancy



- So far, the official advice is that neither mother nor baby is at greater risk from COVID-19 than the rest of the population (excluding those with underlying conditions). Pregnant women are, however, considered to be in the 'vulnerable' group, so do take extra care that you are following all guidelines on social distancing, hand washing and staying at home and working from home where possible, but be reassured that the science says you are not automatically at increased risk from this virus. There are some reassuring videos from the professionals at <https://www.rcog.org.uk/>

- It's very important to still attend antenatal appointments with your midwife, and go to hospital for any scans you need. If you have any questions at all, your midwife will have the best information for you in your area. Keep talking to them - appointments may be a little different to in 'normal' times but everyone is committed to the best care for you and your baby and taking advice from professionals, so put your trust in them.

- Your antenatal classes will have been cancelled in person, so tune in online. Many have been adapted to be taken from the comfort of your own home. You may also wish to consider online fitness routines to keep active, such as pregnancy yoga or Pilates. You can also find one-to-one hypnotherapy, counselling and other services available via video calls. You don't need to be isolated even if you're based at home now.

- Be prepared. Use online facilities to shop or ask someone to source things for you. Many shops and businesses have moved to doorstep deliveries and it can be comforting to have set up a supply of the essentials so you don't feel you'll need to go out and about unnecessarily.

- Once you have all you need for yourself and the baby, embrace this time to rest. Be still. Still the mind. This current pandemic is beyond our control. Stay home and prepare for your baby. Cocoon yourselves in the safety of your home without interruption. You and your partner can enjoy the magical time of pregnancy. Cuddle up, touch your bump, relax.

- Some women may feel energetic at the end of pregnancy and just can't sit still. This used to be called 'nesting' and if it's what you need, go with it. Let yourself nest. Sort out those drawers, finish those nagging projects. Some people need to be busy for their minds to be still. That's OK.

- Try to limit your exposure to the news and social media. Check in to keep yourself informed, but then listen or distract yourself with things that raise your mood or lift you up. Constantly thinking about negative things can cause more worry. Contact people, even if it's just a call to a friend to say you are bored. We have to be socially distant but we don't need to be socially isolated. Be grateful for the little things that make you smile and look forward to the future.



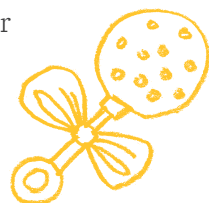
Birth

- In the UK, we are conducting near-real-time surveillance of all women who develop COVID-19 during pregnancy and their newborn babies, through well-established systems already used by all maternity units, and taking advice from World Health Organisation (WHO). There is no evidence so far that the virus can pass to your baby while you are pregnant or during birth (this is called vertical transmission). Giving birth is a natural process and even if you are unlucky enough to have the virus when you go into labour, be reassured that women do cope with giving birth through all sorts of challenges. Trust in your body and the medical teams who will help you.
- The best-laid plans are the ones that are most flexible! Government guidelines keep changing in response to the circumstances surrounding COVID-19 and healthcare access, so keep up to date with what's recommended by your area's maternity services. When you have a strong vision in mind for your birth plan, and things don't happen that way, it can feel distressing. To avoid this, get all the information you can for different situations, and plan what you'd prefer. This way even if Option A doesn't work out, you can make the decision to go with Option B, or Option C, and still feel in control.
- Planned home births are being moved to hospital births in some places for the safety of you and your baby and the staff who will assist you, so keep in touch with your midwife. In most cases, the same 'home birth' team will help you in hospital, and try to keep it as low-stress as possible. It might not be what you looked for in an ideal world, but it can still be special. Ask about what matters to you and how that can be respected.
- In most hospitals you will only be able to have one birthing partner. Due to the logistics of social distancing, vulnerable people in your family or care of younger children, it may not be your partner with you as planned. Think about this beforehand and decide what will make you comfortable. A doula is still an option for those who prefer to choose them as their sole birthing partner.
- In hospital, midwives and staff will be wearing protective clothing (PPE). Don't be alarmed: this is to keep you and your baby safe. As well as limiting birthing partners, visitors will be kept to a minimum. The fewer people travelling the better at present, particularly to and from hospitals, so be prepared that if you need to stay on the ward you may not have much outside social contact for that time. Make sure your bag is well packed for all eventualities.



Newborns

- Once your baby is in your arms, enjoy that moment of meeting your little one. No matter what the circumstances of your baby's birth, this is a special time for both parents and babies. Drink it in. The babies born in 2020 are truly going to have a memorable year of their birth!
- If you have had a hospital birth and you and baby are well, you will be discharged as soon as possible. Home is the best place to recover from birth. Use this time to cocoon your family in its safe space. Let your partner take care of you.
- This is a great time to practice skin to skin (kangaroo) care, which has been shown to increase oxytocin, the 'feel-good' hormone. Holding your little baby with their skin against your skin will help you to calm and to bond with each other, particularly if you had a stressful pregnancy or birth. Your skin helps regulate your baby's temperature and also reduces cortisol, the stress hormone.
- Try to view this period of enforced isolation as a positive thing. In many cultures, new mothers are encouraged to do nothing at all except bond with their baby for up to a month or more after birth. As a maternity nurse, I always advise families to limit visitors, as they can be exhausting to host and everyone wants to cuddle the baby. In the current circumstances, visitors can't outstay their welcome via video chat and you really can have time to bond with your baby without being disturbed. You will have more control over when you speak to people. Use video calls at times suitable for you and the baby. The only visitor you need to have is the midwife.
- If you have chosen to breastfeed, then privacy when getting feeding established is essential - here is another way in which isolation can be a positive thing! Engorged breasts, painful nipples and lack of sleep are not an ideal time for visitors. Breastfeeding is intimate, it's a new skill to learn and it is not always easy trying to position yourself and baby but with time and patience you will find what works. Youtube videos on positioning can be very useful. Check out online breastfeeding support such as La Leche League (www.laleche.org.uk) Breastfeeding can feel strange to begin with but should not be painful, so seek help if you are struggling.
- Maternity nurses are another excellent source of postnatal support: we work very closely with women after birth and have tried and tested ways to help find what works for different mothers and babies. Although a maternity nurse cannot come in person at present, we can find ways to help you from a safe distance via video or phone calls. Sometimes an experienced, professional and compassionate sounding board is what a postnatal mother needs - there can be a lot of information online and it can seem overwhelming, whereas a personal connection with a friendly face is invaluable. Never before in history have we had such amazing technology, so use it to call for help if you



need to; it is here for you. As a maternity nurse myself I would love to help as many women as I can at this vulnerable time and can be contacted via Facebook, where I'm offering free advice every week, or my website, if you'd like more tailored support.

- If you are struggling post birth, or feeling unwell, call your midwife. They can advise you over the phone and refer you to the GP or hospital if needed.

- If you contract COVID-19, you will understandably be worried about your baby as well as feeling unwell. Don't panic! Statistics show that infants and children are not usually affected severely. Close contact between you and your baby risks sharing infective airborne droplets, leading to infection of the baby after birth, but this cannot be readily avoided. Babies need cuddles! You can consider cutting down the risk to your baby as far as possible, however.



- Wash your hands before touching your baby, breast pump or bottles.
- Consider asking someone who is well to feed your baby (you can express breast milk if you are breastfeeding, or use formula.)
- Consider wearing a face mask when feeding, if available. Try to avoid coughing or sneezing on your baby.
- Follow recommendations for breast pump cleaning and bottles or feeding equipment, sterilising after each use.

- Once you are feeling up to it, look up postnatal classes. Baby massage, parent and baby groups, postnatal exercise can all be found online currently. Groups that can answer questions and offer support on feeding and general care for your baby and yourself can be invaluable to new parents. You can also arrange your own group chats with your friends when you are ready and have the energy. Keep an eye on your mental health as well as your physical health and don't be afraid to speak up if you are finding anything difficult. People like to help, and now more than ever we can rely on each other to create community.

- Get into a rhythm. Note down when your baby sleeps, eats and is alert. More information on gentle, baby-led schedules can be found in my book, but I have included a printable day planner here so you can try to notice patterns and work with your baby's natural rhythm. Keeping a schedule can be important to our mental health, so incorporate little things into your day that are predictable: a time for bathing, a time for baby massage and so on. Baby massage in particular is of great value to fathers as well as mothers - they don't always have the same opportunity for bonding time with their baby, especially if mum is breastfeeding. This simple action is the giving and receiving of love and it doesn't cost a thing but deepens relationships and has many unseen benefits.



A Final Word

Remember, there is no right way or wrong way to do things with your baby, as long as it is a safe way.

You will find what suits you and your family; your baby does not know any different, so relax and enjoy these first weeks. Your baby doesn't know what's happening in the outside world, they only know the warmth and love you give them. Take care of yourself, stay safe and trust in your instincts.

Further information

Government advice - <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists - <https://www.rcog.org.uk>

Maternity Action - <https://www.maternityaction.org.uk/covidmaternityfaqs/>



About the Author

Fiona Cooke trained as a midwife but soon realised that caring for babies post-birth, and helping their families, was her calling.

A mother of two, she is now a maternity nurse with years of experience with families of all shapes, sizes, cultures and backgrounds, and a roster of glowing client recommendations. Fiona is absolutely passionate about supporting new parents to find their own way to care for their individual babies.

www.fionacooke.co.uk

www.facebook.com/fionacookematnurse



A Helpful Guide to a Happy Baby offers all the information parents need, when they need it.

- Step-by-step photographic instructions on bathing, swaddling and more
- Easy-to-follow routines to adapt to different lifestyles
- Week-by-week guides to what to expect
- Practical tips to problem-solve common issues.
- A holistic approach to the whole family

Available from Orphans Publishing:

www.orphanspublishing.co.uk

A Happy Baby daily log



time	feeds Breast: L/R Bottle: ml or oz	sleep Went to Sleep/Woke Up	notes
Morning 6am-12pm			
Afternoon 12pm-6pm			
Evening 6pm-11pm			
Through the Night 12am-6am			

