What you really need to know about becoming a new dad.

Helpful hints from SMA Nutrition
Help from people with experience

So you’re going to be a father. How does this feel – quite exhilarating one minute and completely alien the next?

Everyone reacts differently, and there are no set rules to being a ‘Super Dad’. There are, however, answers to some of the questions which may concern you. This booklet has been put together with the help of fathers who are currently surviving this unique experience, and so it is full of realistic and practical advice.

As we aim to constantly improve the quality of the booklets and information we offer to mums and dads, your feedback is greatly appreciated. If you have any tips you think other parents would find useful, or comments on how we could improve this booklet, you can write to us, ring the SMA Careline* or visit our website at www.smanutrition.co.uk

To all those who have already done so, and whose comments we’ve tried to incorporate in this booklet, we’d like to say thank you.
Q. What is my role during the pregnancy and how will I feel?

A. Relegation.

Even before the news is out, you may find that your previous position as centre stage in your partner’s life shifts sideways. This is one experience you’ll be living second hand, and at times it can be hard to handle. Just relax and bask in the reflected glory. She is the one getting lots of attention, and ideally you are the one providing the support. As time moves on, this is an increasingly vital role – and one that as the father of the child only you can fulfill.

Q. What kind of support should I offer?

A. Mental and physical.

During the early stages of your partner’s pregnancy, you may feel that you are living on an emotional rollercoaster with a stranger who may be sick the minute you look at her, bursts into tears for no apparent reason and may be eating for two.

Be thankful it’s not your mind and body that’s having to adjust to the huge hormonal changes caused by pregnancy, and concentrate on getting through as calmly as possible by recognising and adapting to the changing scenario.

Even the most independent partner will now be depending on someone to cook a meal and clear up afterwards, stay awake for the end of the late-night film, drive her to her mother’s when she no longer fits comfortably behind the steering wheel, help her out of the bath, carry heavy loads – and who will clean the bathroom without being asked. And this is just for starters – see section on baby coming home.
Q. How much will our lives alter?

A. It depends on your attitude to the pregnancy.

If your partner has a hard time for the first three months, you’ll probably find yourself cancelling invitations or going out alone. Some women sail through the whole experience and, apart from feeling tired towards the end of the pregnancy, will never have felt better. Nature gives you 9 months to absorb this life changing process, and whilst you’re both doing so, you shouldn’t drop your own interests, just tailor them to suit your partner’s varying energy levels.

If it’s your partner’s first child and she gives up working, you may find that you become her main link with the outside world, so don’t be surprised if she leans on you more than usual.

Any opportunity to meet other prospective parents, at parentcraft classes for instance, is a good idea – as well as a useful investment for a more child orientated future.

Shared experiences with parents at a similar stage of pregnancy or of similar-aged children can put things into perspective and can often be extremely entertaining.

Q. How should we deal with sex?

A. It depends on how you and your partner feel.

It’s normally completely safe to have sex throughout and right up until the end of the pregnancy. If either of you is anxious, or your partner has had a previous miscarriage, check with the midwife or doctor.

The main issue is how you both feel. Lots of men find their pregnant partner incredibly sexy, others are put off because they feel ‘as if there’s somebody else in the room’, or are worried about hurting the baby. Equally, women find that the hormonal and physical changes either diminish or heighten their sex drive.

Whichever category you fall into, take sex nice and easy. In the later stages, making love may become uncomfortable for your partner when she becomes aroused because her womb lifts. This is perfectly normal but may turn enough to put her off the whole idea.

Obviously the more comfortable you both are, the better sex is going to be.
Q. When and how do we plan for the big event?

A. Go with the flow.

As soon as pregnancy is confirmed, you will be sucked into a whole system of antenatal care consisting of regular check-ups, scans of the baby in the womb (definitely a highlight), hospital choice, type of birth, etc. Your partner will get advice and support from a midwife or doctor, and she will have choices to make which you can both get involved in.

You will probably get the opportunity to attend parentcraft classes together. These are invaluable for learning the facts about labour, the birth and subsequent care of your baby. They also prepare you for the things you need to buy for a new baby – and may advise you on the best places to get them.

Parentcraft classes also equip you to draw up a 'birth plan' – deciding where the delivery will take place, how much involvement you'll have, and what sort of pain relief your partner would like on the big day.

This plan will help you make the most of the event many men describe as the most moving of their lives, and can be particularly important during labour when you may be relied upon to reinforce your partner's wishes to the professionals looking after her.