

Highs and lows of having a baby

Pregnancy can be a wonderful time for a couple, as they share the journey and the different stages.

He'll bring her herbal tea and crackers in bed to stave off morning sickness. He will be on top of the world when he feels the baby kicking. And they will both be speculating about what the baby will be like.

But even the positive, well-prepared couple will have anxieties about whether they will be good parents. Everyone else might be able to master the strange art of parenting, but will they?

If the couple is not so close the start of pregnancy may be marked by some disappointed expectations. She wants him to be more involved, but he seems distracted and anxious.

He might be thinking of the change in their financial status that the baby will bring, and how they will cope. She may also be feeling anxious about being a parent, because she hasn't had good experiences with her own parents.

It's also at this stage that the couple swear to each other that this baby will not change their lives – the baby will just have to fit in.

And of course, their baby will never have a dummy and will never sleep in their bed, no matter how little sleep everyone is getting. Be ready to throw these ideas out the window once the infant arrives.

She will also soon discover that everyone is an expert. No need to worry about an ultrasound to determine the sex of the baby – some relative will have a theory or weird way to determine whether it's a boy or a girl. Some believe they can tell just by looking, because girls are carried high in the uterus while boys are low.

The myths and fads could fill a book. And if you're thoroughly sick of all the well-meant but annoying advice, simply smile sweetly, thank the adviser and then totally ignore them.

While antenatal classes are a vital part of good pregnancy preparation, all the classes in the world won't give you that ring of total confidence that you will have the perfect delivery.

Many women worry about how they will cope with the birth and whether things will go wrong.

These are perfectly normal fears that can be shared with each other or the obstetrician, if you feel you can express them.

But if you keep these fears to yourself, also keep them in proportion and realise it is quite normal to explore these fears,

Once the baby has arrived, it's normal to feel you are on another planet – the 24-hour planet where the baby's needs can fill up the entire 24 hours of both mother and father.

It will take about three months to get into a routine. "Going with the flow" and not having too high an expectation of achieving much more than coping with a new baby is the best advice.

But if after a few weeks you feel you are drowning and things are getting worse rather than better, seek outside help.

And don't forget to make time for you and your partner away from the baby.

If doting grandparents are around, leave your baby with them while you and your partner rediscover the joy of a quick lunch or a good coffee.

If there's no such help around, stock up on the things you like treating yourself with and sample them when the baby is having a nap.

Survival tips

- Realise that it's normal to have fears about pregnancy and childbirth
- Don't forget to still have some couple time once the baby has arrived
- If you feel persistently down or overwhelmed by a new baby, ring Parentline on 9417 4140 or tell your Maternal and Child Health nurse.