

FOCUS

VISTA PSYCHOLOGICAL & COUNSELING CENTRE, LLC

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10 Tips for Positive Parenting

1. Be a good role model. Your child learns from the example you set.
2. Give your child lots of encouragement with hugs, and say, "I love you" often.
3. Set simple rules and consequences, and enforce them consistently.
4. Discipline fairly, firmly, and with love. Never use violence or put downs.
5. Always show respect for your child's thoughts and feelings.
6. Spend a lot of time with your child, no matter how busy you are.
7. Know what's going on with your child's life, no matter how busy you are.
8. Encourage daily learning outside of school, especially reading and math.
9. Make sure your child gets enough healthy foods, exercise, and sleep daily.
10. Keep your sense of humor and manage stress in healthy ways. If you feel overwhelmed, arrange for some outside help.

Source:
[PositivePromotions.com/
preventchildabuse](http://PositivePromotions.com/preventchildabuse)

Postpartum Depression and Anxiety...in Fathers?

Becoming a father is one of the most wonderful experiences in a man's life. Whether you have a son to carry on the family name or a daughter who you pray will be a daddy's girl, your fatherhood future looks so promising. But even the most naive of pending papas know that there will be a lot of diapers, sleepless nights, crying, exhaustion — oh, and more diapers. What many men do not anticipate is the potential for significant changes to their mental health. Prenatal and postpartum depression and anxiety are among the most common mental health issues that arise during the transition to fatherhood. Often, we think of the "baby blues" as being an issue only moms struggle with. However, research has shown that upwards of 26% of new fathers experience depression, and 11% experience anxiety during the perinatal period. Until we make substantial headway addressing the underlying causes of these issues and implement proper screening and intervention, fathers will continue to be depressed and anxious while simultaneously trying to care for their families. Mothers clearly exhibit physical changes before, during, and after pregnancy. This is not surprising given the act of growing a human. However, dad bods aside, men experience actual biological changes throughout the pregnancy and following the birth of their child. Namely, testosterone comes with a reputation as the backbone of masculinity — aggression, Type A, domineering, sex-seeking personalities. There is much more to testosterone than the traits of the "bad boys." Significant changes in testosterone occurs when a man becomes a father. Specifically, testosterone decreases just before and right after birth. This decrease has been associated with increased caregiving and child-related household tasks. Men can also expect to have increased bonding hormones, such as dopamine and oxytocin, as the levels of testosterone dip. This helps us fellas be more attuned to the baby's cries and bond emotionally with our bundle of joy. This continues well after birth; this is particularly helpful as fathers tend to emotionally bond with their children later than mothers. Our brains change too when we become a father. Areas of the brain associated with attachment, empathy, and nurturing show an increase in gray and white matter within four months after birth. These areas in the brain actually increase in size. Depression and anxiety are very common mental health issues, particularly for mothers during the postpartum period. However, we are overlooking fathers on a societal level, in the delivery room and in the nursery. Let's take a look at what depression and anxiety in newfound fathers looks like.

Symptoms in postpartum depression in fathers include:

- Sadness, anger, emotional outburst, or irritability
- Little interest in doing things, including caring for their family
- Reduced attention the baby's health and well-child visits
- Changes in motivation, energy, sleep, and/or appetite
- Feeling worthless as a father
- Suicidal thoughts
- Withdrawal from their relationship with their spouse or child
- Physical symptoms such as racing heart rate, panic, gastrointestinal distress, headaches, nausea
- Poor ways of coping with stress, such as an increase in drugs, alcohol, gambling, or wrong too much

Symptoms of anxiety in fathers include:

- Excessive and persistent worry about their child, relationship, and life in general
- Fears of doom or that something bad will happen to them or their new family
- Trouble focusing
- First onset or increase in panic attacks
- Troublesome and/or fearful intrusive thoughts

Many of the reasons men struggle figuring the postpartum period include drastic changes to their social lives. Similar changes are often observed when a man gets married. Single men tend to have mostly single friends, and when a man gets married tension can arise about whether to bring his bride along. Even if a man's friends are okay with it, her presence does have an impact. When a man becomes a father, typically they are so invested in caring for their child and their growing family, call, and texts from friends to unanswered as friendships get overlooked the window of fire time a new father would have given to dudes' night out has all but closed. Marital relationships often change after the baby comes as well. Although couples often feel closer initially, this honeymoon period wears off after about a month when the sleepless nights begin to feel permanent and childcare chores pile on top of already neglected household chores. Let's not forget that having a baby puts the wrong kind of kink in your usual relationship. The OBGYN you both (hopefully) liked is now telling you to hold off on the sex.

Although it might feel like it will never end, sex after baby most often returns. One of the best things you could do as a new father who is experiencing distress leaden up to or following the both of your child is to *talk to someone about it*. Talk to your spouse, friend, pastor, counselor, psychologist, pediatrician — someone you trust. **Postpartum Support International (PSI)** is a good online resource that includes a call or text hotline and an online Dad Support Group. If you are ready to commit to something more in-depth, **Psychology Today's online directory** is a quick way to end treatment facilities in your area. Mothers can be incredibly helpful for fathers who are struggling with any sort of postpartum mental illness. Mommas — please know that you are not responsible for fixing it or making it all go away for him. However, you know your husband enough to know when he needs to speak with a professional. Give him a push! OBGYNs should be the first line of defense for screening against depression for both parents. The **American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists** records completing full assessments or mood and emotional well-being during each postpartum visit with the mother-to-be. However, given that both mothers and fathers experience depression during his wife's pregnancy, these screenings should be happening earlier on in the transition to fatherhood. Pediatricians are also next in line for screening for postpartum mental health issues. **The American Academy of Pediatrics** also recommends incorporating screenings postpartum during well-child visits. In addition to incorporating mental health screening protocols for both parents before and after their child's birth, OBGYNs and Pediatricians should develop strong working relationships with referral sources. Having trusted psychologists, counselors, social workers, and pastors to whom they can refer struggling parents is essential in ensuring he mental health issues described above do not negatively impact their own or their child's physical and emotional wellbeing.

Source: Anthony J. Nedelman, Ph.D. Sharpening Some Iron. Psychological and spiritual wellness for men and fathers. PsychologyToday.com Posted December 7, 2021.



Losing Steam? Avoid These Energy Zappers

What seems like harmless lifestyle habits may really be robbing you of your get-up-and-go.

Let's face it: we all get more fatigued as we get older. It's part of the aging process: we lose mitochondria (energy producing engines in the cells) and we produce less adenosine triphosphate (ATP) — the molecule that delivers energy to cells throughout our body. Other causes of fatigue such as medication side effects or chronic illness like depression or heart disease, can increase the feeling of tiredness or sluggishness. The following energy zappers are common culprits that you can change.

Inactivity We naturally lose muscle mass as we age. "If you have less muscle mass you have fewer mitochondria and less ATP," points out Dr. Marcelo Campos a primary care physician with Harvard Vanguard Medical Associates in Boston. Being sedentary compounds the problem by weakening and shrinking muscles and causing them to use energy inefficiently. Physical activity strengthens muscles, helps them become more efficient and conserve ATP, and increases the production of energy-producing brain chemicals. Don't be intimidated by the recommendation of 30 minutes per day, at least five days per week, of moderate-intensity exercise. The 30 minutes can be spread out into several shorter periods. And you don't need to break a sweat. "Whatever exert use you can do all help," Dr. Campos says. "It can be simple, like climbing stairs or walking farther in a parking lot." Chronic stress can increase levels of cortisol, a hormone produced by the adrenal glands. "Cortisol reduces production of ATP and it increases inflammation, which also reduces ATP production," explains Dr. Campos. However, stress-reduction techniques are associated with lower cortisol levels. Try yoga, mindfulness meditation tai chi, breathing exercises or guided imagery. Even 10 minutes per day can help.

A Poor Diet If you're not nourishing your body you won't have the vitamins and minerals necessary to produce enough ATP, and you'll feel more tired. "Eating too much processed food can increase inflammation, which impairs the production of ATP and energy. Or, if you're older and your appetite isn't what it used to be, you may not give your body the calories and fuel it needs to function," Dr. Campos explains. On the flip side, if you're eating too much food at one time, that can cause blood sugar spikes and lead to fatigue. The fix: eat whole foods, including vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and lean proteins like fish, chicken, nuts, and seeds. The fatty acids in protein-rich foods also help boost ATP, and aim for smaller meals with snacks in between to provide your body with a steady supply of nutrients and fewer blood sugar spikes.

Too Little Sleep A lack of sleep increases cortisol and also promotes inflammation. If sleep issues are caused by sleep apnea (pauses in breathing during sleep), the dips in

blood oxygen levels lowers ATP and energy. Talk to your doctor about underlying problems that may rob you of sleep, such as health conditions (sleep apnea or frequent trips to the bathroom) or medication side effects. And work on improving sleep hygiene: go to bed and wake up at the same time each day, and keep your room cool, quiet, and free of electronics, which stimulate your brain.

Poor Fluid Choices Drinking sugary sodas can cause blood sugar spikes followed by a drop that causes fatigue. Being dehydrated can also make you feel tired, as can drinking too much alcohol or decaffeinated dans near bedtime (alcohol interrupts sleep in the middle of the night). Healthy people need six to eight cups of fluid per day, and more if they're exercising. Avoid soda. "And stop drinking caffeine or alcohol with six to eight hours of bed," Dr. Campos advises.

Social Isolation Being isolated — not seeing others on a regular basis — is associated with depression, and depression is linked to fatigue. "The power of interacting with other human being and connecting with others can bring a different outlook and give you more energy. We are learning more about this. We probably produce different types of brain chemicals that make us happier and give us more energy when we connect to people," Dr. Campos says. Resolve to get together with others eat least once per week. It can be friends, family, neighbors, or even new acquaintances.

When is Low Energy a Problem? "If fatigue is affecting your day," says Dr. Campos, "or if fatigue is accompanied by any other symptoms like headache, muscle or joint pain, five or stomach or urinary problems, it's time to see your doctor."

Source: Harvard Health Letter: Harvard Health Publishing, Harvard Medical School, April 2019.

6 Signs You Are Anxious and Don't Know It

How pushing away emotions can lead to pain and other health problems.

If you are anxious, you would know it, right? Well that would be nice, but the truth is many anxious people are not sure what they feel. Recognizing and naming emotions is a skill to learn, one that not everyone is good at doing. There are six signs you can use to recognize you are struggling with anxiety but avoiding the emotion at the same time. I started getting interested in our ability to mask emotions from my work with chronic pain patients. Many pain sufferers start our pain rehabilitation program with the standard question, "What in the world is going on with me? While we do have a good general explanation of chronic pain based on neuroscience, how and why each person develops chronic pain is a unique story, one that takes some work to uncover. One common struggle that I have noticed among some pain patients is difficulty recognizing and naming emotions,

something that is called *alexithymia* (Greek for “no word for emotion”). In general, when people do not feel well emotionally, they can recognize their discomfort and describe what they feel. But for some people, identifying specific emotions is difficult. They either report feeling numb or can only say, “I just don’t feel well,” but cannot describe anything more. We know that 60-80 percent of health care visits are linked to stress-related problems. Even in the medical setting, people are not coming in to see their doctor saying, “You know my marriage has been quite unsatisfying for the past five years, which is about the time my headaches and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) started. Maybe you could help me look at my marriage issues and provide me with some tools for handling that better.” Rather, what people say is, “What can you give me for my chronic headache and upset stomach?” It is not that we do not want to talk about our life stress—most people, including many health care providers, do not know there is a strong connection between stress, anxiety, and health problems.

Anxiety shows up when we do not have the kind of control in life we would like. For example, anxiety naturally occurs when you are driving down a snow-covered road and realize that your car is starting to slide; as the car slides, you do not have the control you would like. We can experience this emotion that comes from the loss of control in any number of situations, including work, relationships, and as a result of the current pandemic. We can also experience anxiety when picturing future events where we might not have control, like giving a speech a week from now. You can be anxious and still look calm, behave normally, and accomplish important things. Anxiety is not about looking or acting like a nervous person. Here are six signs that you are anxious but do not recognize that anxiety is related to your chronic pain or other health problems you are experiencing.

1. It is hard for you to name emotions. If you cruise through your day without thinking too much about what you feel, have trouble explaining to others what you feel, rarely ask others what they feel, and are not sure what leads to feeling good or bad, you might be struggling with alexithymia.

2. Your chronic pain or other health problems started during a time of stress or transition. If you look back at when your neck started to hurt, your lower back when out, or your overwhelming fatigue set in, you might find that your life was in a major transition or stressful period. Maybe your first child started school, your youngest child left home, your husband retired, a parent died, you were promoted at work, graduated from college, or started a new job. Transitions and stress are

significantly challenging because of our lack of control in these situations, which leads to anxiety.

3. You do not share your emotional ups and downs with others. People who openly share their life with others talk about emotions. People who connect with others mainly through activities like work, sports, or discussions about politics may not be getting below the surface to talk about what they feel or want.

4. You do not know what you need. When our basic needs for connection with others, competence, and autonomy are not met, we are going to experience negative emotions. If you are not aware of your needs, you may not be aware of what you feel when your needs are not met.

5. Your coping strategies are not healthy. Even though you tell yourself you are doing well, you are drinking more alcohol, picking up your old smoking habit again, spending more time and money using illegal/unsafe cannabis products to manage your sleep problems, watching more TV, and reacting with anger at small irritations or nothing at all.

6. You have unexplained pain problems. If you have life challenges and unmet needs but no clearly defined emotions, chronic pain could be what you do feel in the end. The stress you feel at work, the unhappiness you feel at home, and the pressures of life generate emotions, emotions that help us know that something is wrong and needs attention. *Think of physical pain as an alternative way of your brain getting your attention that something is wrong if your emotional warning system is turned off.* To help patients identify emotions, I describe the most common emotions and explain why they are useful. I also discuss how emotions are related to our basic emotional needs. I then spend a bit of extra time specifically talking about anxiety, as that emotion seems more difficult than others for us to live with and manage.

Source: Evan Parks, Psy.D., is a clinical psychologist at Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital and an adjunct assistant professor at Michigan State University College of Human Medicine. He is the host of the Pain Rehab podcast.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/pain-rehabilitation/202111/6-signs-youre-anxious-and-dont-know-it>

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