

Getting Dads Involved in Pregnancy. What You Can Do By Robin Elise Weiss, PhD

Pregnancy is a special time and one that many people want to share with others, especially those closest in our lives.

Our partners are the ones who have to deal with our daily mood swings, cravings, the joys of quickening and the fears of labor. Yet, somehow, we begin to realize that our partner may not be as involved as we would like them to be

This could be for several reasons:

- Partner is uncomfortable with pregnancy
- Partner doesn't know how to be involved
- We have excluded them
- We're obsessed with pregnancy

So, we are going to focus on including our partners in our pregnancies.

The first thing to work out is how involved you want your partner to be and how involved they want to be. This may take a happy medium to be achieved but it is possible.

Some partners want to be involved as much as possible where others want to stand in the waiting room to pass out cigars. There is a similar range in the pregnant sector.

Pascal notes, "I feel too often that partner involvement is a competition between tradition (pregnancy is/was a woman's thing) and political/personal correctness."

"My hubby wanted to know why he couldn't pace in the waiting room," says Anne of her husband.

While John claims, "The most exciting thing was the birth experience; I had a grand time... Wish I could do it again."

"My partner cooks, cleans, shops, gives me sponge baths... he's pretty involved in this pregnancy," claims Alison.

Once you've decided how involved to get, where do you start? Kimberlee Lynn says that she started out by purchasing a book on expectant fathers for her husband, and going on from there.

"I would keep him informed on how I was feeling, every time the baby moved, each Braxton Hicks contraction etc. Not whining, but just to let him know." Sometimes, there needs to be compromise,

"We just discussed the eventuality of a "couple" shower for the baby. I would rather not have cute games and silliness that I have seen prevailing at glimpse of baby showers I have seen. I don't condemn it, I just don't want it if I am involved. On the other hand, I am not sure Jennifer will be satisfied if we make an effort to exclude it from the party... (she said she would)," explains Pascal.

Some other suggestions were to take them to as many visits with your practitioner as possible, or at least the major visits, like hearing the heartbeat or ultrasounds.

"I had IVF and my husband was a part of it since he had to do my shots everyday. He also went with me to all my appointments and even had surgery himself in order for us to conceive. I think that he was involved with this baby way before he was even a reality, " says Margie.

"It's also good to work on decorating the nursery together. Jim was just as involved in picking the wall paper and curtains, crib, and sheets as I was," offers Kimberlee Lynn. "We also went

to pick out stuff to register together, and He also was at the baby shower, opening presents along with me."

Here are other suggestions:

- Take childbirth classes together
- Talk about it
- Read together
- Tour your Birth Facility
- Keep a journal or write a note to your baby
- Have a couple's shower

Another issue can be the changes in the pregnant woman's body.

"We signed up for a couple's massage class. Got him close to my 'off limits'- ever changing body and gave him tools for comforting me and caressing me...which we hope to use during labor," suggests Mari.

Stacy talks about how her partner helped her, "Once I woke up in the middle of the night and was really upset and pondered waking Andrew up. I did and we talked and I cried and he made me feel better and he didn't go back to sleep until I did first."

One dad remembers the first movements, "She'd stay up all night watching her belly and waiting for him to move so when it finally happened she was so excited. In the middle of the night she shook me awake and said... 'IT MOVED... IT MOVED!' But I was so tired.. I just rolled over, grunted, put my hand on her belly and fell back asleep."

Whatever you and your partner decide is right for you is what you should do. As Margie reminds us, "It was truly a team effort."