

After the Baby is Born, Continued

Kaleb Montgomery, DTCM

I was lying in bed trying to get my two sons asleep thinking about what I was going to write this article about. The deadline for submission was two days past and I had not even started writing it yet. Worse than that, I had no idea about what I was going to write. Lying there I was cycling through the list of excuses as to why I didn't have anything written or even a topic to write about. As you can imagine, most of the excuses had to do with me being busy. My life is quite busy. I have a private practice in a couple of locations. I also teach at a couple of colleges, plus supervise student clinics at two locations. This entails making lesson plans, and creating and marking exams and assignments, not to mention the actual teaching. I write articles for a couple of publications as well. I volunteer regularly at a local midwife clinic showing people how to use acupressure to make labor easier and less painful. All of this keeps me quite busy. However none of the things in this list was what was going through my head. All of the excuses about being busy that came flying through my over-extended brain had to do with being a dad.

I am sure that right now you are asking "Why is he bothering to tell me all this?" Quite a few articles ago, I wrote about the [difficulties that modern women encountered](#) with trying to juggle career and motherhood ("Now What? After the Baby Is Born," June, 2008). Today I am going to talk further upon this and, more specifically, fatherhood. You might ask again "What does this have to do with being an acupuncturist or herbalist?" Well I am happy you asked.

Being a health care provider, one of our most important jobs is to connect with our patients. All of us have parents and many of our patients are parents. However being a parent today is much different than being a parent when we were kids. I remember being kicked out of the house at 4 or 5 years old and not coming home again until supper. We would eat lunch at a friend's place, not call home, and it was not a problem. That is definitely not the case today. Children are barely out of a parents sight for almost every second of the day. The point here is that if you are not a parent, you can't use your own childhood as an experience gauge to connect to parents today. Things are very different.

I want to start out by saying that being a dad is the thing of which I am most proud and most passionate. My wife and I have three children, ages 4, 2.5 and 8 months. The middle child does not sleep well. He is up one to two times on a good night, and the baby is up every 1.5 hours. The two oldest kids are extremely energetic and will destroy a whole morning's housework within minutes. My wife is at home with the kids. Everyone who has older kids tells us to enjoy this time. They say that our kids are the most fun at this age and that we will miss it when they are past this stage. I certainly try to take this advice to heart. The older two boys are tons of fun, and the baby is smiling and moving around now. I try to enjoy lying in bed putting them asleep too, although most of the time I am thinking about the dishes or the bottomless pile of laundry that won't get done because my wife and I are too tired by the time all the kids are asleep to do anything but watch a bit of television before unconsciousness slams into us. (Some would argue, with merit, that the unconsciousness starts once the TV is switched on.)

If you had to ask me to characterize parenthood with young kids, the first thing that would come

out of my mouth would be the crushing amount of work and the zombie-like state of sleep deprivation in which we must function, combined with the minute amount of free time left over at the end of each day. My wife once actually forgot how to say the word "water," she was so tired. I have to have every small request e-mailed to me or I will forget it before someone has even finished asking me. I once drove away while leaving my youngest child in her car seat on the sidewalk. Luckily, my wife was slightly more alert than me and noticed before I fully pulled away. Needless to say, she has not and probably never will let me forget that one. For nonparents, this is a view into the crazy world of parents with young kids. For those of you with older kids, you forget how insane it is. For those of you with young kids, hopefully this helps you realize you are not alone.

Most of the time, the dad point of view only sees the light of day when two dads talk across the fence in a backyard or in a mother-free corner of the play ground. I somehow feel I will be ridiculed by women (mothers) for "complaining" about the lot of a dad. One of the reasons for this is that no matter how hard things are for dads, it is always harder for the mother. She is the one who breastfeeds the child every day, can sooth baby the best when it is really upset and has to go through pregnancy and childbirth. Nothing the dad goes through can really stack up to that.

A father's life changes dramatically too. He just can't complain to his wife about it without getting, "You think you're tired?" Case in point: Explaining to a female colleague with a 5-year-old child about the dad focus of the article, I got the "You get to go to work and talk to adults" line right back at me. Mothers of young children have it hard and are generally not sympathetic at all to the plight of dads.

To use a practical example, we (not just men but women too) used to need a break when we got home from work. Now work is a break. Coming home from work now means barely being able to get changed before screaming dirt/food/juice/milk/vomit/pee/poo-covered children are thrust upon you while mom takes a break from the craziness of her day. If you dare to have the gall to mention that you could use a break because you had a hard day at work too, your wife will say, "You got to ride the subway alone, didn't you?"

Generally, dad's second job at home does stop until all the children are asleep many hours later. Even then, there are chores to get to that did not get done in the day like laundry folding and dishes. Every morning that I am not working, I take the kids and let my wife sleep. I will change diapers, get milk, do the leftover dishes from the night before, make breakfast, feed the baby, referee the two older children, clean up from breakfast, clean up the kids, dress them and herd them off to the park. The end result is that the only days I get to "sleep in" are Father's Day and my birthday. When I am not working, I take the lion's share of child care. I will do grocery shopping, laundry and dishes, play with the kids, feed, dress, bathe and clean up after the kids and put them to bed.

Now I can hear the roar of outrage from all you moms out there. Relax. Like I mentioned earlier, you have the harder job. It's just that we dads don't get credit for the work we do and this article is about dads.

I am not writing this because I think I am unique. I know I'm not. In our fathers' and grandfathers' generation, their roles were mostly limited to working to bring home the bacon and some time playing with the kids. Not that I am underplaying the role of a provider. Once you become a dad, it is like this provider gene switches on and the money needed to maintain or improve your family's lifestyle takes on a whole new importance. Of course, many households have two incomes and the woman is also helping to provide. Even in these dual-income cases, the stress of providing more often than not affects the dad more than the mom, regardless of who makes more money.

The modern dad has to be proficient at everything his wife is, plus be good at his paying job. This is a big change from most of our father role models. How are we supposed to negotiate these different roles? Who do we look to for help or guidance? Next time we will explore this idea of a lack of good role models and the consequences of this.

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