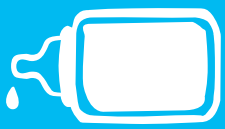
‘So funny you’ll be glad you’re having a baby!’
JOSH WIDDICOMBE

DON’T PANIC!



ALL THE STUFF THE EXPECTANT DAD NEEDS TO KNOW

GEORGE LEWIS

‘Great advice - funny enough to read if it wasn’t’
ROMESH RANGANATHAN



GEORGE LEWIS is a dad, stand-up comedian, actor and writer from Stockport who has achieved remarkable success on social media for his hilarious and instantly relatable sketches. Described as 'the funniest dad on Instagram' with over half a million followers and over 300 million views on Instagram alone, George sold out his 2024 UK Tour, with extra dates added due to overwhelming demand. George was the winner of *Celebrity Mastermind* (specialist subject: Oasis), hosted *Top Gear Extra Gear*, and appeared as a regular on ITV2's *The Stand Up Sketch Show*. George has also written for some of the biggest shows on TV and radio, including *8 Out of 10 Cats*, *Have I Got News for You*, *Hypothetical* & BBC Radio 4.

DON'T PANIC!



ALL THE STUFF THE EXPECTANT DAD NEEDS TO KNOW

GEORGE LEWIS

monoray

Medical disclaimer
While all reasonable care has been taken in the preparation of this book the information it contains is not intended to take the place of advice from or treatment by a qualified medical practitioner. If you have concerns about your own or your baby's health, you must seek professional advice. Any reliance on the information contained in this book is at the reader's sole discretion and risk.

First published in Great Britain in 2022 by Monoray, an imprint of
Octopus Publishing Group Ltd
Carmelite House
50 Victoria Embankment
London EC4Y 0DZ
www.octopusbooks.co.uk
www.octopusbooksusa.com

An Hachette UK Company
www.hachette.co.uk

The authorized representative in the EEA is Hachette Ireland, 8 Castlecourt Centre, Dublin 15, D15 XTP3, Ireland (email: info@hbgi.ie)

First published in paperback in 2025

Text copyright © George Lewis 2022, 2025
Author photograph on page 1 copyright © Lucy Ridges
'Sindhu Vee', pp.98–101 © Sindhu Vee 2022

Distributed in the US by Hachette Book Group
1290 Avenue of the Americas , 4th and 5th Floors
New York, NY 10104

Distributed in Canada by Canadian Manda Group
664 Annette St., Toronto, Ontario, Canada M6S 2C8

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

George Lewis has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 to be identified as the author of this work.

ISBN 978-1-80096-345-0
A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound in Great Britain.
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

This FSC® label means that materials used for the product have been responsibly sourced.

MIX
Paper | Supporting responsible forestry
FSC® C104740
FSC
www.fsc.org

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER 1 PREGNANCY 4

CHAPTER 2 THE BUILD-UP 31

CHAPTER 3 HIGH ALERT 56

CHAPTER 4 THE BIRTH 64

CHAPTER 5 THE FIRST WEEK 92

CHAPTER 6 THE FIRST MONTH 121

CHAPTER 7 ONE TO THREE MONTHS 153

CHAPTER 8 THREE TO SIX MONTHS 186

CHAPTER 9 SIX TO TWELVE MONTHS 208

CHAPTER 10 ONE YEAR + 247

A LITTLE MORE FROM GEORGE 289

USEFUL BOOKS 305

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 306

INDEX 308



INTRODUCTION

YOU'RE GOING TO BE A DAD. DON'T PANIC!

Before you have kids, it feels like every parent you know constantly says to you, 'It's the best thing you'll ever do.' Then, when you tell them you are going to have one, they give you a smile that says, 'Unlucky, sucker!' That's when the panic sets in.

It can feel like your whole life is about to change and you need to learn everything there is to know about how to be a dad in a very short amount of time.

But it's going to be absolutely fine, mate. The thing that helped me most when I was going through it for the first time was to have friends who could fill me in on what's what; other dads who were a few steps ahead of me on the same path who

could say, 'Don't worry too much about that bit' or 'Oh yeah, that's horrible, isn't it?' or 'Get that checked *right now*! Look at the colour of it!'

This book is not a definitive guide to the best way of doing things. It's not a medical book by any stretch of the imagination and it's not always backed up by science (or even logic). But it will give you a very good idea of all of the stuff you need to do, and some of the things my friends and I learned might help you not to mess up your kid so much that they run off and join a cult.

I'm a normal person who works as a comedian and I spend my days writing jokes for TV shows and silly articles about football, and my evenings driving around the country to try to make strangers laugh. But none of those things prepares you for fatherhood. Apart from a helpful anonymous midwife and Adam Kay, who is an actual doctor, all of my friends who have contributed to this book are successful comedians, but when it comes to being parents, they are all going through the same things you will go through. They all felt underqualified for it, just like I did and just like you will. We had to learn most things on the job and had lots of moments where we got it wrong or thought we wouldn't be able to do it. But we did. And you can too.

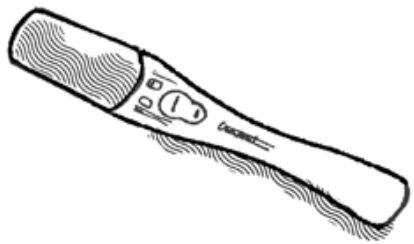
Hopefully that hasn't got you so pumped up with confidence that you've slammed the book shut and strutted away into fatherhood, because there are quite a few things you need to know first.

ALL OF THE DADS

My situation is what some people might consider 'traditional' and some others might consider 'the most painfully dull and unimaginative thing in the world': I have a wife and two kids. But, as anyone who has ever stayed the night with another family knows, no family is normal.

Dads come in all shapes and sizes. There are young dads, old dads, stepdads, foster dads, rich dads, poor dads, dads who never thought they wanted to be dads and dads who never thought they could. Some dads are straight, some dads are gay, some dads aren't called Dad. There are separated dads and dads who are going to separate. There are stay-at-home dads, work-away dads, co-parenting dads, single dads and dads who can't see their kids. You might be a completely different dad altogether. Whatever dad you are – or are going to be – you will have a lot in common with the rest of us. And when we share our experiences of fatherhood, we can really help one another.

There may even be some mums who read this. And to you I say, welcome. Have a look around, enjoy yourself. We've got nothing to hide. But you probably don't want to waste your time with the 'Dad Tricks' sections. There really is nothing of interest in there so, if I were you, I'd just skip right past those. OK? Good.



CHAPTER 1

PREGNANCY

Every future dad reacts differently when he hears the words, 'I'm pregnant'. You might punch the air, burst into tears, feel like you want to shout it from the rooftops or pretend it's not happening. You might feel relief, you might feel dread, you might feel nothing. No emotion is right or wrong and you will probably go through loads of them in the next few weeks, so don't attach too much to the first one you feel.

RUSSELL KANE: I was weirdly serene when I found out I was going to become a dad. I'd planned the conception to the day and, when Lindsey walked in with the blue line on a stick, I just thought: indeed, we're on schedule. We even planned the conception at the time of the month to give the highest chance of getting a girl. We desperately wanted a girl. As sexist and gender-norm as it sounds in these modern times, we both hate sport, armies and all the lame things boys like. My daughter will probably grow up to play for England knowing my luck.

IAIN STIRLING: I ran laps around the dining room table, absolutely delighted. A few hours later I played some FIFA on my PlayStation, realized I wouldn't be able to do this in a year's time and had a mild panic attack. In all honesty, I felt ready. It's a really exciting feeling to be fair. The first time I've ever had a job coming up that I truly felt ready for. Properly prepared, like I'm built for it. But when I told other fathers this, they all looked at me the same way. The way you look at a five-year-old who's just told you they still believe in Santa. A look that suggested my naivety was astonishing and in a mere couple of weeks I would be tired, crying and covered in another human's shit. I just hoped they were wrong. I hoped all 57 of them were wrong.

ARE YOU SURE SHE'S PREGNANT?

To be holding this book I suspect your answer is: pretty sure mate, yes.

But during the first part of the pregnancy, it will be something you doubt at several points. You might have expected that after you'd seen the blue line on the test, you'd then go to a doctor to get it confirmed, but no. After you've had your positive test, there is no interaction with a medical professional until eight weeks later, other than a quick appointment with the GP to get you 'into the system'. Even then, all a midwife will do with your partner is go through her medical history, check her height, weight and blood pressure, do a blood test and take a urine sample. They usually don't do a test to prove whether or not she is actually pregnant until the 12-week scan. That's three months just relying on your own medical conclusion! And how many PhDs do you have? So, prepare yourself for a strange period where you constantly question everything.

Your partner will probably have a better idea about the whole thing because she'll start having pregnancy-related symptoms, such as nausea, fatigue and a weird taste in her mouth, so she might get annoyed by you questioning it. But even she will have her doubts at times. If it gets too much, in the UK, you have the option of paying for an early scan. Or you can do what we did and refuse to go for one of these but spend the equivalent money on extra pregnancy tests every time you do a big shop.

DAD TRICK Buy the expensive pregnancy test for the initial one, then a shitload of cheap ones to have in the house. You can get them for a couple of quid in the supermarket. I can't tell you how many times you'll want to do another to double-check if she is actually pregnant and these will give you the reassurance you need. If you go with Clearblue for every test, you'll have no money for nappies when the baby arrives.

The uncertainty got so much for us that we managed to convince a midwife in the family to borrow a Doppler (a tool for listening to baby's heartbeat) from work and have a listen the next time we saw her, which happened to be Christmas Day. She was initially reluctant, which at the time we couldn't understand. What could be more perfect than hearing new life on Christmas morning? It'd be like our own little nativity scene. But I realized why she had her reservations when, a couple of minutes into her investigation, she couldn't find the heartbeat.

She was trying to wear an expression that everything was absolutely fine, but broke character when Uncle Terry came into the room with a bottle of Buck's Fizz and said, 'Merry Christm—' and she snapped, 'Terry, just fuck off for a minute!' This definitely wasn't like the nativity.

Luckily, it was as if the baby sensed the tension and immediately wriggled into a position to reveal its heartbeat. Everything was instantly OK and Terry was told to crack open his bottle.

The baby was still the size of a strawberry at this point, so it's easy to see why it might be tricky to find the heartbeat, but it's very hard to use the logic of fruit when you're sitting there in complete silence fearing the worst. This was one of many more worries to come. But thankfully, the worries you experience far outweigh the likelihood that anything will go wrong.

ASSISTED CONCEPTION

The process of getting pregnant is not a level playing field. For some people it can take seconds and for some it can take years. Some use *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) or surrogacy, either because they have found it difficult to get pregnant or, like Jen Brister, because they are part of a same-sex couple.

JEN BRISTER: If I can give any couple advice when it comes to IVF it's this: looking for any reassurance from a fertility clinic is like expecting a coherent answer from Mystic Meg.

It quickly became clear to both of us that IVF is not an exact science. In fact, it would be fair to say that they don't really know what the hell they're doing. The whole process is so frustrating and demoralizing I'm surprised we don't see more ovulating women dancing naked under a full moon shaking some lucky heather in the air out of sheer desperation.

I still find it astounding that when so much money and heartache is at stake, we put all our faith in a science which is about as precise as watching two toddlers play Velcro darts while blindfolded.

Being the 'other' parent is a weird position to be in, because it doesn't really matter how committed you are to 'the process' or to your partner, when you're not the one trying to get pregnant it's hard to stay 100 per cent connected; there is a disconnect with what is happening to your partner (everything) and what is happening to you (absolutely nothing). Naturally, a little part of your brain will start to shut down, or at least a bit of mine did.

I tried to be 'present' and supportive during my girlfriend's IVF treatment, and I think for the most part I was. I just wasn't really necessary to the entire proceedings. Or any of the proceedings. What I'm saying is, at this point I felt surplus to requirements.

It's a weird place to find yourself in because, as I became more invested in the idea of becoming a parent, I became more aware of how nothing I did, or didn't do, could affect the final outcome.

Trying for a baby is all-consuming, even if you consider yourself to be the most pragmatic, dispassionate and objective person on the planet. Once you start the process, the stakes accelerate to stratospherically high very quickly.

That imaginary baby that you felt no real attachment to at the beginning suddenly becomes your everything. It didn't seem to matter that we had been perfectly happy without a baby, that we enjoyed our jobs, our friends, our social life, our independence. Now all we wanted was a baby, with no real understanding of what having a baby meant.

My advice is, if you can talk to anyone who has already been through the process, then do it. There is so much obfuscation that it can be frustrating and disheartening when it doesn't work the first, second or even third time around. And if you feel like the clinic you're with isn't working for you, don't stay with them; our first clinic was a disaster and I'm positive we would never have conceived had we stayed with them. Follow your instincts and, lastly, DON'T TELL ANYONE you're going through it, unless you want people asking you every time you meet up whether you're pregnant yet. Eventually you will want to punch them in the face, even if you are pregnant.

SHARING YOUR NEWS

Obviously, this one is completely up to you, but the general advice is to not tell people before the first scan because things can sometimes go wrong and, if they do, the last thing you want is all of those people you told sending congratulations cards and asking you all about it. But of course a lot of people will still want to tell those closest to them earlier than this.

When you do tell loved ones your news, there can sometimes be a gap between the reaction you expect them to have and the reaction they actually have. Without even realizing it, I bet you have a version of the scene in your head of when you tell your mum or nana or best mate. And if they don't react that way, it can be surprising, confusing or upsetting. Maybe they won't be as happy as you'd hoped, maybe they'll cry, maybe they will give a simple 'oh dear'. But that just isn't something you can control. Try not to pin too much on this moment. You'll have a much more accurate read on how they feel a couple of years in and all will be a distant memory (that you might hold against them forever).

When (and if) you decide the time is right to announce your news to the rest of the world, a convenient thing to do these days is the social media post. It's an easy way to tell lots of people at once and it keeps all of the discussion and reaction in one place so you don't need to answer the same questions from everyone. It's also your chance to get the biggest likes-haul you've ever had, unless you've had a photo with Mike Tyson.

There are different styles you can employ for this announcement and you've probably seen a few of them. Some people post pictures of scans next to a cinema board announcing 'Baby Lewis coming next June'; some post black-and-white photos of anonymous babies' feet with a phrase on it like 'our family is about to get two feet bigger'; some mums pose wearing funny T-shirts, like one with the words 'ICE ICE' above where the baby will be. I've even seen a picture of a dog wearing a T-shirt that says 'I'm going to be a brother', which raised a hell of a lot of questions in my head.

You might think some of these styles are absolutely lovely and some of them are the most cringeworthy things you'll ever see, but try not to judge these parents – it's an emotional time and it's a hard thing to know how to announce. They won't judge you either. Unless you do that dog thing.

ANDY PARSONS: If a mate of mine told me he was about to become a dad, I'd be incredibly positive about it; there's no point telling them all the shit that goes with it – you may as well be happy beforehand because it is about to be a massive arse-ache for 18 years and quite possibly forever. Because that's the thing about parenting... everything else in your life may be temporary – your job, your relationship, even your nationality – but you are about to be a parent for life. And you can kid yourself that your kids will be different – that they won't be the selfish, ungrateful, difficult, moaning, time-sapping, holiday-wrecking money pit that you were – but they won't. You might convince yourself that having a second kid will make having the first easier because they will have somebody else to play with, whereas in fact it will just be double the shit. You could kid yourself that average UK happiness steadily increases from late forties onwards because jobs get easier or people understand themselves better, whereas in truth it's because of all the increased happiness of parents whose kids have finally left home.

If you did tell your mate all the huge list of negatives, they might say, 'I only said I was having a kid but you're

crapping on about it endlessly like it's the only thing you're able to talk about', and you could say, 'Ah, that's another thing I should mention...'

Telling work

Even though you'll have to tell the company you work for at some point to give them a heads-up you'll be taking paternity leave, it's a lot less of a big deal for men than it is for women. Unfairly for them, their pregnancy announcement can often come with a negative impact on their career and they might find they get treated differently from the moment they share their news. In contrast, it's been shown that men's careers improve after having children. Yet another bit of proof that life is a lot easier for men. Look down between your legs right now and say 'thanks again, little guy.'

Your announcement isn't going to send your boss into a spin because it will be assumed you're only going to take a couple of weeks off. Two weeks is the standard paternity leave a father is entitled to in the UK, although more and more companies are becoming flexible on this, offering longer leave and the option for shared parental leave. Shared parental leave means the mum takes less than her entitled maternity (at the time of writing, in the UK, this is up to 39 weeks' statutory paid leave and up to 52 weeks off) and you take more. So, in theory, she could go back to work after a few weeks and you could be at home for months. But this is a fairly recent development and far from the norm.

There's no rush for you to tell other people at work either because, as soon as you do, it will be the theme of your small talk every single day for months. So if I were you, I'd wait until

you are really sick of the chat about the weather or the faulty microwave and then – and only then – deploy your brand-new chat subject. From that point onwards, you'll have the following exchange each time you get in a lift:

'How long have you got left?'

'A few months.'

'Get your sleep in now!' [Polite half laugh which lasts for as long as possible, then awkward silence for the rest of the lift journey.]

SCANS

The ultrasound scans are both incredibly exciting and worrying. You are offered two during the pregnancy (sometimes more if they want to monitor you for any reason). The first is between 8 and 14 weeks and the second is between 18 and 21 weeks. The first scan is sometimes called the dating scan and it gives you a due date. It's worth mentioning that this date is *very* rough and your baby can be born weeks and weeks either side. But getting this date also means you can do the maths and pinpoint which particular romantic evening got her pregnant. This is when your eyes will widen and you'll go, 'Oh, it was *that* time', then you agree to pretend it was the lovely night with all the candles and not the drunken fumble that you threw up after.

It's at this scan when you actually see your baby (or babies!) for the first time, and it is confirmed that you weren't imagining the whole thing. For some dads, this is a really magical moment and they will burst into tears at the sight of their baby. For some,

the feeling will be one of terror because the whole thing suddenly gets real. Some dads won't feel anything. But none of these reactions are wrong or right and they don't have any bearing on the type of dad you will go on to be.

For me, it was a huge feeling of relief when I first saw my baby. I was content, but I certainly wasn't overcome with emotion and I had no urge to cry. After a few minutes, the relief settled and I just got sleepy. I didn't realize how long you have to sit in a dark room. It seemed to take ages and, as lovely as it is to see your baby, it's just an undetailed blob when you stop concentrating, so after a short while, it's easy to drift off.

When the checks are complete, they will offer you a picture of the scan of your baby to take away, and it usually costs a few quid so take some cash. Well, they say it's your baby, but it would be a very easy scam for them to just print off the same picture for everyone. They all look the same at this point. I'm not saying that's what they do, but they could.

As well as the lovely little moments watching your baby wriggle around, there's a more serious side. You will also be offered screenings to assess the chances your baby has Down's, Edwards' and Patau's syndromes at the first scan. You don't have to have them, but most people do. This screening doesn't come with any risk, but it also won't tell you for certain if your baby has one of these conditions, just if the probability is high, and you get the result in the post a while later. I have to warn you that when you know that this is what they're testing for it is hard not to play out hypothetical situations in your head. You will likely have moral dilemmas about what you would do if your baby is shown to have one of the conditions. You'll possibly ask yourself

really difficult questions about whether you'd be able to cope and it might throw you into a place of guilt or even upsetting disagreements with your partner. Or you might avoid discussing it at all because you're worried about what your partner might say or you're worried about what your partner might think about what you say.

Out of all the things you will worry about during the pregnancy, this one is not worth the mental discomfort it will cause you. The likelihood of Down's syndrome, for instance, is very low at around 1 in 700 (with a higher likelihood in older mums). And it's hard to really know how you would feel about something like this until it actually happens. So, if you can, try not to spend too much time with that hypothetical.

If your results show a high probability, you might be offered further diagnostics tests, where they might take samples of the cells from the placenta or some of the amniotic fluid (the stuff that surrounds the baby in the womb) to analyze chromosomes. But these do come with the risk of miscarriage, albeit a very low one. This is a horrible dilemma to be in and there is a lot to think about. The NHS recommends the charity ARC (Antenatal Results and Choices), which offers loads of information about results and your choices.

It's also worth mentioning here that there is a new test called non-invasive prenatal testing (NIPT), which is currently being rolled out across the UK. It is done via a blood test taken from the mother and uses cutting-edge DNA technology to assess the likelihood of Down's, Edwards' and Patau's syndromes and poses no risk to mother or baby.

ELIS JAMES: I had never been anxious or nervous, but I found myself being far less relaxed about the whole thing than I had expected. We would go into scans and I'd see couples in the waiting room smiling at each other and holding hands, whereas I just felt like I was about to sit the most important exam of my life without having done any of the revision. Whenever I'd see a couple looking relaxed I'd think, 'Don't you get it? You're about to see a picture of your baby...on a screen! WHY AREN'T YOU CONSUMED BY WORRY?'

I also hadn't realized how easy a deal the man gets during the pregnancy. Isy would get so tired I would have to take her shoes off for her as soon as she entered the house, and she found it difficult to sleep, especially during the last few months. It felt very unfair.

Finding out the sex

Usually during your second scan you'll get the option to find out the gender of your baby. But the main purpose of the scan is to look at your baby's development in detail and check for physical abnormalities, and I certainly remember feeling like any talk of gender was seen as trivial by our sonographer. This is a bit unfair because it is something every parent is thinking about. There are benefits to both finding out and keeping it a surprise. Some people say finding out helps them bond with the baby before it's born and means you can plan things a bit better. But if you choose to wait it keeps the excitement, and I know my wife found it was an extra little thing to help her through the difficult

parts of labour. I can imagine it's the same feeling I have when watching *Midsomer Murders* – it's a real struggle and there are points when I just feel like giving up, but I have to see it through to the end to find out who it is. Waiting until the baby arrives to find out also gives you the perfect line to use when out shopping: 'Do you really think we should spend all that money on clothes/a pillow/blah blah blah before we even know the gender?'

To be honest, they are both pretty great and exciting options and the choice will probably depend on your and your partner's personalities. It's worth noting they can't be 100 per cent certain of your baby's gender because babies aren't always in the best position for you to see and everything is still pretty small. No offence to your unborn baby, but their penis, if they have one, is tiny.

CHANGES FOR HER AND YOU

The changes for a pregnant woman are monumental. There are the obvious physical ones. She may be sick for months on end. She's growing in size and weight every single day and getting more and more uncomfortable as she does. Her organs are getting squished and she'll become short of breath because her lungs have no room to inflate. Her back will ache with the weight, which gets greater every day. She is constantly knackered, but can't sleep because every time she tries the little human lying inside her starts wriggling around. Then there are the mental changes.

She's feeling the pressure to do everything possible to grow her baby the best she can. Dealing with the constant worry she

will do the wrong thing or eat the wrong thing or something bad will happen for no reason. She has the feeling of watching her body change in ways she might not like. The sense that she isn't herself anymore and has become just a vessel. The constant anxiety over the birth, which can seem scary and impossible. Her hormones will be all over the place too and she'll go from rage to happiness to heartbreak within seconds for no reason.

Compared to all this, your changes are almost not worth mentioning. You lucky bastard. But there are thousands of books for pregnant women. So, now we've acknowledged and agreed how much harder it is for them, let's indulge ourselves. This is a book for dads (and mums are unlikely to be reading this bit) so we can afford to feel sorry for ourselves about the things we go through.

For a lot of men, it comes as a surprise how little changes for you at first because there are zero physical changes, unless you are one of the men who experiences 'sympathy weight gain'. I know, that sounds like an excuse, but it's a pretty good one ('Yes, I've developed a beer gut, but it's because I'm feeling *your* pain.')

You don't really have to alter your behaviour in any way either. But for men, the first big changes are psychological ones and they will come gradually or hit you all at once at another time (more on that later). As a man – maybe because of traditional gender roles or stuff we've experienced in our own families – there are certain pressures we feel or put on ourselves. Many of you will be worried about providing for your family financially, protecting them, and you're probably worried you're going to have to change things about yourself and your lifestyle that you don't really want to change.

There are bound to be moments when you freak out and think you're not ready to become a dad yet. But the truth is, if you waited to feel 100 per cent ready, you'd be waiting forever. There are always things you still want to do before you get 'tied down' and you will probably always be scared of growing up and having more responsibilities. But being a dad doesn't signal the end of everything. It's the beginning of a brand-new thing. Yes, some stuff will change and get harder, but you'll still be able to do all the things you enjoy, you just might have to plan some of them in advance or build up considerably more credit with your other half than you used to. But the flipside is that there are so many more interesting and exciting adventures about to open up to you.

Your life isn't over when you become a dad. Just look at someone like Liam Gallagher. He's a dad; does his life look like it's over? And most men worry they can't do it. But like I said, Liam Gallagher.

IAIN STIRLING: I thought about my own behaviour a lot more during the pregnancy – mainly what effect my behaviour will have on those around me. I imagined if someone behaved like that towards my child and how that would make me feel. I'm a better person for it – considerably more anxious, but better.

HOW MUCH DOES A BABY COST?

A shitload. But don't worry, that's over the course of a lifetime and anything costs a staggering amount when you work it out like that. You'd probably be floored by the amount you will spend on plastic bags over your lifetime and they're not going to surround you and comfort you on your death bed. Unless things get really bad.

It's obviously best to start budgeting early and save up as much as you can before the birth. But as long as you're doing what you can, try not to get too worried about money. Babies don't arrive with an invoice that has to be paid immediately. The costs early on can actually be really low because they don't need a lot at first (see page 39 for a list of the essentials).

But in a section like this, you probably want an actual figure. There have been plenty of studies on this and they vary by the tens (and even hundreds) of thousands. That could be because most are carried out by businesses with a vested interest. Be as sceptical of these as you would of a pie manufacturer's survey that shows women love a man who smells of steak and kidney. Businesses know that if they manage to normalize spending huge amounts on baby products then people are more likely to spend huge amounts on their baby products.

But figures like this can be terrifying for parents who don't have much money. Across the country, and across the world, people are making it work with wildly different budgets. You can spend a fortune on the latest, most stylish stuff or you can be a bit more resourceful and buy second-hand or even get stuff for free.

A more trusted source than the baby company-funded

surveys is The Child Poverty Action Group, whose latest report says that the cost of raising a child until the age of 18 (including rent and childcare) is £151,000 for couples and £185,000 for lone parents (presumably because they need more childcare and rent isn't as good value for a single person). There's no doubt it's an eye-watering figure but, as I say, it doesn't come all at once and, thankfully, we live in a country that provides some financial help to parents who need it, even though the government could be doing a lot more. A quick search for 'benefits for new parents' will tell you what you're entitled to and most people get at least a small amount.

That large overall figure also doesn't take into account all of the money you save as a parent because of lifestyle changes. You're probably starting to realize that you'll no longer be going on as many boozy weekends away or out for romantic meals in restaurants as much as you used to (sorry) so a lot of the cost of a child isn't extra, it's just reallocation of the money you'd spend anyway. And once you've got all of the essentials, the running costs can be really low. At first, it's just milk and nappies really. When they start to eat, they can usually have a bit of the thing you were making for yourself. Eventually they will start wanting things like cool toys and trainers, but by that point you can probably get them to take on a paper round to pay their way.

The most important thing to remember is the love that you give your child will far outweigh anything that money could ever provide. As long as they are cared for, fed and kept warm, I doubt they really know the difference between living in a single-bedroom flat and living in Simon Cowell's mansion (except for the guy wandering around in high-waisted trousers,

crushing dreams). But there's no doubt it still takes a little while to adjust. Especially to the feeling that, from the moment your baby arrives, your money is no longer yours, it's your family's. That's nice in some ways. It's good to have something this important to work for and you will probably make more sensible financial decisions now because they are for the good of your family.

But another side effect is the guilt you now feel for anything you buy that is for you. Getting yourself a pair of trainers or a haircut feels selfish. Each time you pay over the odds for a craft beer, you'll feel like you are drinking away your child's milk money. Again, it'll settle down after a while. In the meantime, you can make yourself feel better by growing your hair a bit longer, wearing holes in your trainers and drinking cooking wine.

Child benefit

Unless you or your partner earn over £50k you'll get just over £20 a week for your first child. And it's easy to claim at gov.uk. If you do earn over £50k, you'll still get it, but you'll be taxed on it, so it won't be as much. And if you earn over £60k, then pleased to meet you, Mr Alan Sugar. You lose all of it in tax at this point, sorry.

THE BUMP

One side effect of pregnancy you might have noticed if you're eagle-eyed is the growth of a rather large thing in roughly the centre of your partner. It starts as a little bump and, within a few

months, swells to a size that defies physics. If you were to draw an accurate picture of a pregnant woman, it'd look like you're really quite crap at drawing. I'm not sure how they don't all just topple over.

The general things a woman needs to do to care for the bump are the same things she needs to do to care for herself: eat well, rest and exercise where possible. But she'll also be knackered, her moods will be all over the place and she'll get weird cravings. So, while you should support her healthy lifestyle by cooking and joining her on walks, she'll already feel like her body isn't her own, so I wouldn't pass comment on what she is or isn't putting in it if I were you, unless one of her cravings is cigars. Even then, you risk her taking it from her mouth and putting it out on your arm while she says, 'You grow the fucking baby then.'

Sounds

Your baby can hear stuff long before it's born so, presuming you talk to your partner, it will get used to your voice, then find it a comfort when it is out in the real world. This means that, as stupid as it will feel, it absolutely makes sense to talk to the bump. It helps to start to form a bond with your baby, and your partner will quite possibly find it adorable. The baby may even communicate back with kicks, which will give you a lovely feeling of connection and it has the bonus effect of being a funny way to mess with the mum. It's like she's wearing those trick electrical buzzers, but the remote is your voice and the buzzer is a human in her belly.

It's also worth remembering this sound recognition when picking which TV programmes to watch during the pregnancy,

because new research shows that babies can understand sounds well enough when in the womb to retain memory of them after the birth. After our baby was born, he seemed to be comforted every time he heard the *Friends* theme tune, which is what my wife watched constantly during pregnancy. With that in mind, choose something you're happy to stick on regularly when the baby is here. I'm very grateful we made our way through *Game of Thrones* before my wife got pregnant. I loved it, but I'm not sure how I'd have felt about having a baby who can only sleep to the murderous screams of the Dothraki warriors.

Kicking

There comes a point where you start to feel – and later see – the baby moving within your wife's abdomen. Some dads will find this magical and some (more normal) dads will find it strange to see a human squirming around inside another human. But you do get used to it and seeing your child moving becomes as reassuring as it is weird.

Oh, and here's something to watch out for as the bump grows: if she has an inny belly button, it can pop out (not across the room, just to an 'outy' position). So that's a little bit of fun for you. It usually goes back after birth.

Things to say and not say

It can be confusing at first because it seems like the rules have changed and it's now acceptable to talk about a pregnant woman's size. But be careful, my friend, because it's all in the detail. When you are talking about her being big (which will inevitably happen, so it is weird not to talk about it) always direct

your observations at the bump. Saying 'the bump is huge!' is totally fine and even shows just how much you appreciate what she's going through. But if you find yourself saying 'you are huge!' you are on very dodgy ground.

Some other more complimentary things to say are to tell her how neat the bump is or how she doesn't look pregnant from behind. But only say these if they are true. If she's put on eight stone it will sound sarcastic and she might look at you like she wants to throw a vase at your head. Or she might just throw a vase at your head.

The baby's movements

As the pregnancy progresses, the mum will feel movements. It begins with gentle fluttering, usually between 16 and 24 weeks, then eventually becomes more noticeable kicks and wriggles. While this can get uncomfortable and annoying for the mum, it is comforting to feel.

There is no set amount of times a baby should move in a day, but a woman will get used to her baby's habits. So, when they change and the baby goes quiet, it can send you both into a panicked and spiralling negative thought pattern. Like when you phone your partner and they don't answer a couple of times so you convince yourself they have driven off a cliff and you have to start planning your life without them.

But – and I speak from personal experience here – there can be loads of reasons you might not feel the baby moving. It might've shifted positions, making movements less noticeable. It might be surrounded by a lot of fluid. It might just be having a lazy day. So you need to avoid jumping to the worst conclusions

every time and set about doing something to alleviate the worry.

First of all, if your partner ever feels that something is wrong, you can always contact the hospital. They will likely ask you to pop in so they can check everything over. Don't worry about doing this – they will be more than happy to put your mind at ease and they have people coming in all day every day for this exact reason. I don't know anyone who hasn't done this at least once during the pregnancy. There are a couple of quick fixes you can do at home too, to try to get the baby wriggling. The mum can drink a nice cold glass of orange juice or you can jiggle her belly about a bit (this is the only time you should EVER do this).

FIRST AID

There are a couple of things that were on my to-do list for years and years that always seemed easy to put off, but played on my mind because I knew that if I suddenly needed them, it'd be too late. One of these was to learn what to do if you get caught in sinking sand and another was to learn what do if someone is choking. Just before our baby was born we finally decided we needed to do a first aid course.

There are companies set up specifically to teach new and prospective parents first aid. They can come to your house and you can have several of your parent friends round and split the cost. I can't tell you what a reassurance it is to know what you need to do if a baby is choking, hits their head or cuts themselves, so I recommend booking one. I'm still not sure what you do in quicksand. It's either move around a lot or not at all. Hmmm.

CLEANING UP SHIT

If you've got a pet, it starts now! Cat faeces can carry a parasite that can harm unborn babies, so the litter tray is your job for the next few months I'm afraid, pal. But don't sulk too much; on balance you've probably still got the best deal. Beware of hamsters, mice, guinea pigs, snakes, lizards, turtles and other exotic pets too. They can all carry germs that can be harmful to pregnant women. Consider this job as practice, because when your baby comes along, cleaning up shit is going to become one of your biggest pastimes.

HAVING SEX

There is no telling how pregnancy will affect your partner's libido. Some pregnant women will be keener than ever. Some will take a nun-like vow of abstinence. Some will be filled with desire one moment, then repulsed by the thought of intimacy the next. In my experience, this seems to occur the moment I take my clothes off.

The way you feel about sex might change too. You'll almost certainly want to still have it because you're a man, but there will be more things on your mind than usual. Firstly, your partner has a baby bump. You're not sure whether you're meant to find this attractive or not, and whichever way you feel, it feels like the wrong one. If you're not attracted to this new shape, you'll feel guilty. How can you stop fancying your partner now she's having your kid, you pig?! And if you realize that pregnant women turn

you on more than anything, you'll feel wrong in a different way and fret about the complications your new-found fetish will cause you in the future. Well, don't worry; if you're not mad on the bump look, it's OK – it only lasts a few months. And if you are, great! Enjoy it! If you need to, you can always have more babies after this one.

You'll also worry about your unborn baby when having sex. It feels awkward knowing your child is right there and most men are concerned they might poke it. Well, unless you're that bloke whose picture gets circulated around every single stag do WhatsApp group, you'll be fine. You're not going to get anywhere near. And, even if you are that bloke (hello mate, I never thought I'd get to talk to you), it's still not really a worry because the baby is in an amniotic sac (imagine a Zorb filled with liquid) and the cervix is closed, keeping the baby in…and you out. So, it couldn't be any more well-protected. Don't worry about your kid seeing your penis either. For the reasons already explained, it won't be able to, and even if it could, it has no concept of why seeing its dads would be so mortifyingly embarrassing.

The key thing to keep in mind is to pick positions which suit her new shape and avoid anything that involves you putting all of your body weight on her stomach. She'll feel conscious of her new body as well, so as long as you're aware of that (don't *keep* going on about how brilliant her new huge boobs are) there's no reason you shouldn't have loads of sex! (Apart from the usual ones: she has a headache, backache, she's tired, she preferred you when you were in better physical shape…)

In summary, while the changes that you experience as a dad throughout the bulk of the pregnancy are nothing compared to those of the mum, they still involve bigger mental shifts than you will have experienced in a long time. In the first six or seven months, the changes will be slow and hard to pin down, but as you enter the final couple of months before the birth, things start to ramp up…



CHAPTER 2

THE BUILD-UP

Once you've managed to get your head around the fact that you are going to be a dad, a new feeling is likely to take over – the feeling that you aren't ready and you will never be ready. Well, you're right, you aren't, but don't worry because you're not meant to be yet. In this chapter we'll discuss all of the things you need to do. But relax because it is all very manageable and you've still got quite a while before there are any huge changes to your life.