

The
Wise mama

Guide to Maternity Leave

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A note from
Lisa Abramson



*Let's
face it.*

If you've gotten engaged, most of your focus was probably on wedding planning and the honeymoon, as opposed to preparing for a healthy and long marriage.

The same can be true for pregnancy, where new moms spend most of their time and energy worrying about the birth, as opposed to their maternity leave, and then life with a baby.

But, just like on your wedding day, you can't predict if it will rain or shine, but you can make plans so that no matter what happens, you'll know where to turn.

I created this Maternity Leave Guide to help new moms feel a little less overwhelmed, and a little more in control of their post natal life.

Childbirth lasts one day (hopefully!), but motherhood is forever. I'm here to help you prepare for the forever part.

Negotiate your Leave & Request the Longest Leave Possible

First, breathe. You're not required to tell your employer that you're pregnant immediately. Use the first few months as an opportunity to information gather. Search your intranet to find out how many weeks/months you're entitled to. If there's nothing there, talk to someone in human resources. If you know any women who have taken maternity leave within your company, engage them in casual conversation about how much time they took off.

Once you know what you're entitled to, and you're comfortable telling your boss that you're expecting, have a conversation about your leave with a number in mind. If you know what you're entitled to, you have stories of other women who took x number of months, and you've saved up your vacation days, your boss should have no issue in agreeing with your number.



Honor your Leave & Allow Yourself ^{to}_{be} Offline Completely

This will involve transitioning all of your work to other colleagues and allowing yourself to be truly unavailable. Work will survive without you for the time being, and you will survive without work temporarily.

Assume that you are going to be completely unavailable for at least the first 6 weeks. Set that boundary up front by telling your boss and colleagues that you won't be checking your email at all for a certain amount of time.

Yes, setting expectations and boundaries is very uncomfortable. As women, we're expected to please others, so saying no isn't something that comes easy to us. But by doing this in advance, you'll save yourself the stress of having to deal with work while you're sleep deprived and adapting to life with a baby. Your colleagues will thank you in the long run.

Prioritize Sleep

How much sleep did you need before pregnancy? This number should be your daily goal. While it isn't possible to get that much sleep continuously with a newborn, you can start to catch up on your sleep with naps.

Try your best to get your sleep in segments that add up to your pre-pregnancy sleep needs. For example, if you need 9 hours of sleep to feel healthy and energized, perhaps you can sleep from 9-11pm (2 hours), 12-3am (3 hours), 4-6am (2 hours), and take an afternoon nap from 2-4pm (2 hours). Each day will be different, but aim for your sleep goal as your #1 self-care priority.

You might be wondering: How am I going to prioritize sleep with a newborn? You could talk with your partner before the baby is born and ask them if they could do the last feed of the evening so that you can head to bed early. If you have close friends or family around, ask someone to watch your baby for an hour or two, so that you can nap uninterrupted.

And if you're unable to sleep, even though you have created these sacred times

for rest, you might want to seek out a [therapist](#) to support you. Not being able to rest, even when you have time to, can be a sign of [postpartum depression and anxiety](#). And the longer you go without sleep, the more intense your symptoms can become.

As a new mom, the advice "sleep when the baby sleeps," is more difficult than it sounds. You'll likely worry about when your little one will wake up. If that's the case, try resting with your baby close to you. Practicing [meditation](#) can be restorative, and you can feel rejuvenated even if you don't fall asleep. (Although I think you'll have to try really hard not to fall asleep to this [relaxing sleep meditation!](#))

You might find tools like sleep meditation, aromatherapy, earplugs, and deep belly breathing techniques necessary to ease into sleep. Think about what you'll need to rest well (i.e., dark room, pillow, or earplugs).

It might seem excessive now, but allocate areas in your home to rest during the day (i.e., sofa, guest room) and night (your room, the babies room).



Talk With Your Partner, Even About the Stuff That's Hard to Talk About.

Taking care of a baby is overwhelming. Knowing how much sleep your partner needs for new moms, as well as for new dads. Try talking about your expectations ahead of time, as a lot of the conflict post baby will be around differing opinions about what each other's expectations are. For example, as a new mom, you'll want to know if your partner is willing/able to help you with the last feeding or night shifts. Likewise, your partner will need to know if this is what you are expecting. If you have this conversation, as well as other difficult conversations before baby is born, when you are both relatively well rested, you'll save yourself some bickering. As a new mom, it's important to remember that your partner still needs to get their basic needs met (like sleep), and that the transition to parenthood will be challenging for them as well.

Knowing how much sleep your partner needs to feel functional in a 24-hour period will be helpful. A conversation that you need to have before the baby arrives is whether your partner will take time off from work right away or wait until family and friends have gone home. You might prefer to spread out the care, and want your partner to take leave after your relatives have gone home. However, if you feel the first few weeks will be the hardest for you, you might want your partner around with your family to have "all hands on deck."

On the next page are some questions that you can ask your partner to get the conversation flowing about what life will be like post baby and what you both can expect from each other.

Are you taking any type of paternity leave?

Are you able to work from home at all?

When will you go back to work?

What time will you get home most evenings?

If you are going to be more than 15 minutes later than expected, will you text me?

When you are back at work, who will be helping to support me when you are gone?

Will you be waking up at night for feedings or not on work nights?

Or will you do the diaper changing and burping after I feed the baby? Or will we switch nights?

Remember. you're on the same team remember that when your party is off duty, and both adjusting to the to really let the other person rest. If mom is demands of your new baby. This is the first taking a break, but has to give step-by-step time both of you are learning how to take instructions the entire time, this isn't a real care of your new baby, so be patient with break. This also means that mom needs yourself and each other. Sometimes to let go (if necessary, leave the the partner assumes the mom house) and let your partner learn always knows what to do to on their own, and develop their calm the baby. This can be a own style of parenting. lot of pressure! It's helpful to



Throw Away Your *Mile High* Expectations

Newborns are adorable and a miracle in their own right. When your baby is born, you will find yourself being in awe of the fact that you created a life! These moments of awe will come and go, but your first weeks will be consumed by changing diapers, getting your baby to sleep, feeding your baby, and taking care of your most basic needs (shower, food, and sleep).

A good tip is to lower your expectations and to let go of what you believe life “should” be as a parent before the baby arrives. It’s extremely probable that if you believe you “should” be able to go out to dinner at least once a week as a new parent that your greatest challenge as a new parent will be going to a restaurant, as your baby will either make it impossible to leave the house, or will scream every time you sit down for dinner/lunch. If you’re convinced that

your baby will be a good sleeper, (because why wouldn’t they?), it’s probable that your baby will wake up every hour on the hour.

The less expectations you have as a new parent, the less likely you’re going to feel like a failure, bad mom, or like your baby is “difficult” when things don’t go as planned. For example, there will come a time where you’ll be at your wits end because your baby just won’t stop crying. After having changed a diaper, fed, and tried to put them to sleep, you will have the option to either just hope that your baby stops crying, and get more and more frustrated, or just accept the fact that you’ve tried, that there’s nothing wrong with you or the baby, and that you deserve a five or ten minute break before you attempt to calm your baby down. Again. This will get easier with practice.

*Another
helpful
tactic*

is to trade expectations for appreciation of what is. Look around, and then ask yourself this powerful question: “what’s not wrong right now?” and write five things down. Shifting away from your expectations, into appreciation can help flood your body with feel good hormones. And let’s be honest. Doing something other than taking care of your baby’s basic needs and yours will feel like you’ve just run a marathon. And won.

The daily postpartum checklist (see final page) is also helpful for resetting your expectations. And remember that checking off a single item on the list is a WIN! It might seem ridiculous now, but “just” feeding yourself and your baby for the day can be a jam-packed and exhausting day, and if you manage to squeeze in a shower, that’s an amazing postnatal day.

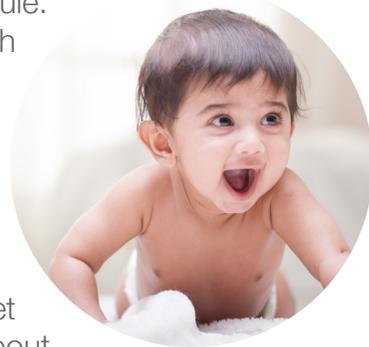
Lastly, give yourself the emotional and mental space for your postpartum experience to be whatever it will be—both positive and negative. Don’t expect life to be anything like it was before you became a mom. And no matter what happens, you’ll find your new normal in time. You may become a mom overnight, but it takes a while for the rest of your life to catch up.



Find Your Working Mom Tribe

Write down the names of your friends that are already working parents that you see eye-to-eye with, as well as any friends that are pregnant around the same time as you. If none of your friends are parents, or pregnant, “mommy and me” groups, pre and post natal yoga, baby boot camp classes, and breastfeeding groups are a great start. If your pre baby life is quite hectic, social media also offers you the opportunity to connect with like-minded parents, without having to add more “stuff” to your schedule.

A great thing to do is to reach out to three of your closest friends and talk with them about how they can best support you after your baby is born. (Example: As I approach my baby’s due date, I wanted to reach out and let you know that although I’m very excited to meet my baby, I’m also a little nervous about this big change. I feel like I’m going to need your support more than ever, and I’d love to know that I can reach out to you when sh*t hits the fan, or gets all over the wall as I’ve heard that can happen! Can you check in with me and make sure to ask me how I’m really doing and if I’m having a hard time? I know just chatting with you will make me feel better.)



Get Comfortable Asking for Help

*You've
probably
heard*

the phrase, “It takes a village to raise a child.” If you’re not a parent, queue the eye roll. But parents everywhere agree with this saying. As a new mom, you don’t have to do it alone, and it’s very unlikely that your partner or family expect you to. So when you need help, ask for it. Don’t expect your hubby, family, and friends to be mind readers and know that you’re struggling.

As women, we feel that asking for help is a weakness, or that we’re not good enough. However, the opposite is true. It shows immense strength and emotional maturity to know what you need and to vocalize it. All moms who’ve made it through the first year or even the first few months, know how hard it is to care for a newborn, so reach out to them, even if you don’t know them that well. Just hearing “it will get better,” or “this is just

a phase,” is incredibly therapeutic. Make asking for help a habit by asking someone to help you at least once day. And yes, it’s best to start this TODAY so that you get used to the feelings that arise when you ask for help. It can often be uncomfortable, especially if this is a new skill for you.

Lastly, if you find yourself having an especially challenging time, it can be helpful to review the common symptoms of postpartum mood disorders [here](#), and then meet with a therapist who specializes in maternal mental health. Postpartum depression is more common than you’d think affecting one in seven women who give birth each year and can occur anytime in the first year following childbirth. If you find yourself suffering, like I did (see my [Tedx Talk](#) for the whole story), know it’s not your fault and you will get better, but seek professional help immediately. There is no need to suffer in silence.

Plan For *More* Help Than You Think You Need

*Have you
thought
about*

what help you will need once you get home from the hospital? Who will do the cooking, cleaning, and laundry? Think about who can help you with these tasks. Perhaps you can get your friends and family to cook you weekly meals so that you have leftovers, and have only to reheat your food. Instead of a baby shower, maybe you can gather your friends for a cook-a-thon, and stuff your freezer with healthy meals that you and hubby can have post baby. Additionally, maybe your parents or in laws can help you do laundry? If you don't have a cleaner, maybe it's time to get one on a weekly rotation. If you don't have any family nearby or even if you do, think about hiring a postpartum doula for those first few weeks after birth.

It's vital that you rest and recover from childbirth. Although this process is natural, your body has just created a life, and delivered it (i.e., taken a beating). You wouldn't go run 10 miles the day after completing a



marathon – so don't overdo it after childbirth. Many women outside of the US are supported post delivery by their families and communities, and are not allowed to do any housework and chores for the first month. Your family and friends will want to help, but you'll need to let them know what you need. Check out this [receiving support meditation](#). And remember how good it feels to help others. You are not being needy; you are giving others a chance to feel great.

Whether it's a postpartum doula, night nurse, babysitter, mother's helper, lactation consultant, house cleaner or chef, find people in your area and make a budget for what you can afford and who you'd like to hire. Remember, the first few months are the hardest, and this period doesn't last forever. So if you need help, get it. The investment in your sanity is worth it. You can check out [DONA International](#) to find a list of postpartum doulas in your area. Also, [TaskRabbit](#) is helpful for eclectic needs and [UrbanSitter](#) and [Care.com](#) are helpful spots to look for babysitters.

About Lisa

Lisa
Abramson is an entrepreneur, executive coach and advocate for maternal mental health. She founded Wise Mama and co-founded Mindfulness Based Achievement, the New MBA, which teaches high potential women leaders how to create sustainable success. Her MBA curriculum has been taught to hundreds of women, as well as at Google, Cisco, The Stanford Graduate School of Business, LinkedIn, YouTube, Salesforce, Goldman Sachs, Bain & Co. and many others.

Lisa was recently honored as one of the [100 Most Influential Leaders Empowering Women Worldwide by EBW](#).

She has given a [Tedx talk](#) and been featured in Fast Company, sharing [5 Ways To Lean In Without Burning Out](#). Lisa graduated from Vanderbilt University in Nashville, TN and lives in Menlo Park, California with her husband and daughter.



Your New To Do List While on *Maternity Leave*

One of the hardest things about transitioning into motherhood is that you're probably used to rocking your to do list and getting stuff done. Achievement, efficiency and order have always been your strong suits. So it's hard to imagine that things will change when you're on maternity leave and sending a single email can be akin to climbing Mt. Everest.

So for all of you who love your to do lists and can't help but check things off, remember that during your maternity leave doing just one of these things a day is a MAJOR win.

- I asked someone for help
- I fed my baby
- I got out of bed
- I took a shower
- I ate a meal
- I read a book to my baby
- I went to my doctor's appointment today
- I took my baby to the doctor
- I sang to my baby today
- I did something just for me
- I did some self-care
- I snuggled with my baby
- I fed my baby without getting distracted by my phone or the TV
- I kissed my baby
- I let someone help me
- I shared how I'm really feeling
- I shared how I'm feeling and what I need to make things better
- I set a boundary and kept it
- I said "no" to something
- I shared my preferences and said no to something that I didn't like
- I spoke kindly to myself today
- My baby was cared for today (even if it wasn't by me)
- I was patient with myself today
- I bathed my baby today
- I accepted imperfection and "good enough" today
- I did something that was hard for me
- I acknowledged that I'm not ok, and that's ok
- I left the house today
- I went for a walk
- I got dressed today
- I called a friend today
- I stopped doing something that was not supporting me (googling random things/mindless Facebook scrolling/etc)
- I meditated today
- I noticed my chest rising and falling and then my baby's chest doing the same thing
- I took one long deep breath
- I took a break
- I took five minutes for me
- I took my vitamins today
- I laughed today
- I spoke up for myself today
- I didn't get poop on myself
- I confided in a friend
- I was honest with my partner
- I let myself release my emotions and have a good cry