



Ann Douglas is an award-winning writer and the author of 27 books, including the bestselling *The Mother of All Pregnancy Books*, *The Mother of All Baby Books*, *The Mother of All Toddler Books*, *The Mother of All Parenting Books*, and *The Mother of All Pregnancy Organizers*. You can find book excerpts, articles, tip sheets, and more by visiting Ann's website at www.having-a-baby.com.

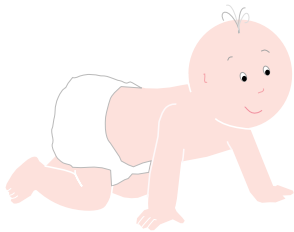
The Postpartum Survival Guide

by **Ann Douglas**

No matter how much time you spent babysitting as a teenager or how many baby care books you've devoured since the pregnancy test came back positive, nothing can ever fully prepare you for the experience of becoming a mother. Many new mothers describe the early weeks after the birth as the best of times and the worst of times all wrapped up into one exhilarating and yet exhausting package: a time to celebrate your newfound status as a mother while simultaneously mourning the loss of your pre-baby freedom. Add to this the fact that your body is busy morphing back to its pre-pregnant state and the fact you haven't had a good night's sleep since the second trimester (if then!) and you can see why the postpartum period tends to be a bit of a rocky ride.

Here are some tips on making the most of this wacky but wonderful time in your life.

- **Schedule a babymoon.** According to childbirth educator Sheila Kitzinger, there's a case to be made for taking a "babymoon" – time alone as a family during the early hours and days after the birth. Not only do you need a chance to get used to the fact that you are actually someone's mother: you also need time to recover from the birth. (Hey, they don't call it "labor" for nothing!)
- **Limit the number of visitors during the early weeks of your baby's life.** Once you've had the chance to babymoon for a day or two, you may be eager to start showing off the new arrival. To prevent yourself from becoming totally exhausted, you'll probably want to limit the frequency and duration of visits. If, like many new parents, you find yourself playing hostess to a steady stream of visitors who drop by daily or (horrors!) overstay their welcome, you might fall back on some tried-and-true techniques like staying in your nightie and housecoat all day long or entertaining visitors in your bedroom rather than the livingroom. That way, you'll be sending visitors a message loud and clear: this new mom needs her rest!
- **Accept any and all offers of help.** Keep a running list of jobs that need to be done. That way, if someone calls to ask what they can do to help, you'll be able to assign them a particular task: e.g., picking up some fresh fruit and vegetables at the grocery store, mailing some letters for you, or folding a load of laundry. After all, if there's one time in your life when you're entitled to call in your favours, this is it. You've got the Mother of All Excuses!



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Page One Productions Inc.
3108 Frances Stewart Road
Peterborough, Ontario
K9H 7J8 Canada
Fax: 705-742-9672
ann@having-a-baby.com

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- **Put your support team in place.** Make a list of all the people you can turn to for assistance when the going gets rough: friends who have recently had babies and who will be only too happy to answer your questions about everything from feeding to diapering, health care professionals in your community who are available to answer questions or provide other types of support, and local businesses that may be able to make your life easier after the birth (e.g. a grocery store or drugstore that will deliver orders right to your door; a cleaning service that offers a special discount to new mothers; or a postpartum doula who provides household help and breastfeeding advice for a set hourly fee). You might also want to scout out some parenting websites so that you can hook up with a group of new moms who gave birth the same month as you did. Two great spots for Canadian moms to head are Canadian Parents Online www.canadianparents.com and Today's Parent.com www.todaysparent.com. Trust me! Parenthood will seem a whole lot less overwhelming once you've lined up all the necessary backup.
- **Find ways to stay connected to your partner.** The postpartum period can be a wild ride for couples, too. Not only are you both trying to learn the ins and outs of baby care: you're also dealing with chronic sleep deprivation. Add to that the fact that your sex life has likely gone into hibernation for at least the next few weeks and you can see why it's easy to get out of sync with your partner. Still, as exhausted as you are likely to be at this stage of the game, it's important to make an effort to let your partner know that the bond between the two of you is still as strong as ever. He's not being replaced in his role as leading man: he's simply being asked to share his star billing with a highly demanding eight-pound co-star!
- **Don't play Martha Stewart unless you want to.** Rather than trying to catch up on the housework each time your baby takes a nap, hit the couch yourself. Your rest is more important than trying to live up to Martha Stewart-like housekeeping standards. On the other hand, if living in chaos is making you crazy, see if you can get a friend or relative to pitch in. Chances are they'll be only too happy to help.
- **Remind yourself that this too shall pass.** You aren't doomed to spend the rest of your life stumbling around in a zombie state with a puddle of spitups on your shoulder. And after your baby has grown into a free-spirited toddler, chances are you'll find yourself feeling a little wistful as you reflect back on these baby days. They truly are the stuff of which memories are made.