

BECOMING a parent for the first time can be daunting at the best of times, but as the country struggles with the economic burden of the recession things have never been trickier for expectant mums and dads.

Breast feeding, nappy changes and disruptive sleep patterns are just the tip of the iceberg for brand new parents, which is why baby food specialists SMA have brought together experts in four different fields of parenting to help lift the load facing expectant couples.

Their brainchild is the brilliant website www.rollercoaster.ie, which offers advice on everything from eating patterns to financial stipulations. **SWM** chats with the four parenting specialists, and hears their important tips.

Preparing for birth

Midwife and Antenatal Educator, Susan MacNicholas's top tips:

● **Eat Well:** Eat a healthy, balanced diet with plenty of iron, calcium and folate-rich foods. Eating lots of fruits and vegetables as well as whole-grain foods will help prevent constipation, which can be a problem in pregnancy.

● **Antenatal class:** Get accurate and up-to-date information from qualified professionals to alleviate any fears, allowing you to make informed decisions and to be as prepared as possible. They are also a great way to meet other parents-to-be.

● **Be prepared:** Wash all baby clothes (even new ones) in non-biological washing detergent prior to packing for hospital. Have all equipment assembled and ensure that you can fit the car seat into your car. Try to prepare and freeze some



ANSWERS: SMA experts John Lowe, Susan MacNicholas, John Sharry and Anne Sidnell

DARAGH KEANY meets the baby experts who reveal how to enjoy the rollercoaster of new parenting



HOW EXPECTING COUPLES FIRST-TIME



meals for yourselves in advance. It makes life a bit easier in the few days after returning home.

● **Exercise:** Stay as physically fit as possible as it can help speed up labour and aid recovery time. Walking, swimming, yoga or pilates are ideal. Pelvic floor exercises are important during pregnancy and the post-natal period to strengthen and regain tone in the pelvic floor muscles and minimise bladder problems.

Just remember that parenting is not meant to be perfect – it's a learning experience.

Enjoy first-time parenthood
Family and Child Psychotherapist, John Sharry's top tips:

● **Look after yourself:** In the joy of being a new parent, it's easy to get caught up in thinking only of the needs of your baby. It's important to prioritise your own needs as well, to prevent stress and exhaustion and to ensure that you are happy and positive.

● **Go with the flow:** Having a



TOT IT UP: Prepare to budget and plan for your new baby

baby brings huge changes to your life (good *and* challenging). The parents who do best go with the flow and enjoy the adventure.

● **Enjoy every minute:** Try and enjoy every minute with your new baby. Even the stress of a night feed can be thought of as a precious moment... especially when you think that in a few months your baby will have moved on.

● **Get support:** They say it takes a village to raise a child. Don't take on the challenges alone – seek support from friends and family. Problems and joys shared with others make the journey all the more worthwhile.

Feeding Your Baby
Nutritionist, Anne Sidnell's top tips:

● **The first six months:** Right from birth, good nutrition is key to helping infants reach every developmental milestone. Breastfeeding is the best way to feed your baby, giving them all the nourishment they need.

Young babies grow rapidly and double their birth weight by five months.

Feed your baby on demand – whether breastfeeding, bottle-feeding or a mixture. Don't make your baby finish a bottle if they have had enough.

If using powder formula, make up the feeds as you need them rather than preparing a day's worth in one go. Also make up each feed correctly and don't add extra powder to the bottle.

● **Weaning:** Between the age of four to six months your baby will signal that they are ready for weaning. Iron is very important at this stage, so you should give your baby iron-rich foods and iron-fortified foods to prevent deficiency.

● **Six to 12 months:** Now foods become more important but babies still need 500-600 ml of

breast or formula milk each day. From 12 months of age, babies should be having three meals a day, plus 350ml of milk per day (full fat cows' or toddler milk).

Babies learn to like foods. Keep offering healthy foods such as veg, even if your baby doesn't like them at first. If he/she sees you eating the same foods they will learn to enjoy them.

Financial planning

Financial Advisor, John Lowe's top tips:

● **Freedom for families:** When expenditure exceeds income, you must cut costs or earn more. Surplus income will define parents' ability to borrow and save. These are the five areas you must plan even before that child has arrived:

1: Space: You will need room – an extension, renovation, or moving to a larger home. Income and your cash flow will dictate what you can or cannot afford.

1: Baby budget: You'll need a cot, pram, baby clothes and nappies to start with. Completed your annual household budget?

1: Child-minding fees: Would it be more economical to share an au pair?

1: Education: If your child goes to fee-paying schools, you will need to find around €70,000 from birth to completion of third level education to cover everything including education.

1: Protection: Life and disability insurance should be considered and even income protection and redundancy cover, in case either parent is unable to work financially.

There are a number of other economical steps you can take in bringing up Junior but at the heart of it all is planning.

More advice can be found on www.rollercoaster.ie. ●



CAN GET TO GRIPS WITH FEARS

