



Stresses of Parenting

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Stresses of parenting

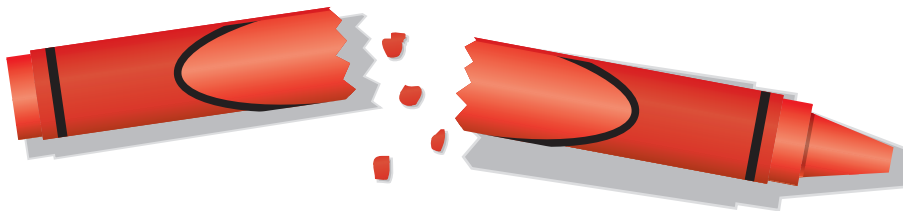
Being a parent can be a true joy, but it isn't easy. Parenting is a round-the-clock job with many concerns and demands that can be very stressful. When you factor in caring for and worrying about the health of a child or newborn with medical problems, the stress increases.

In an article in the March 3, 1999,

issue of *JAMA*, researchers found that mothers of very low-birth-weight babies had higher levels of stress than mothers of babies with average birth weight. They also found that mothers who had very low-birth-weight babies with medical complications had an even higher level of stress and that they continued to have higher levels of stress

even 2 years after the birth of their child.

To effectively manage the stress of being a parent and the caregiver of a sick child, it is important to recognize the accumulation of stress from each role.



WHAT TO DO ABOUT STRESS:

- Take a breather (deep breathing can quickly and effectively relieve stress)
- Take a break (even a short break of 5 minutes can provide stress-relieving benefits)
- Make time for yourself (provide regularly scheduled breaks by having a reliable and trusted person help with parenting duties or enroll your child in a certified daycare program)
- Make time for exercise and regular daily activities
- For severe stress, seek the help of a physician or other health care professional

SIGNS OF TOO MUCH STRESS:

- Feeling tired and irritable most of the time
- Feelings of being down or low that last more than a few days
- More than usual difficulty concentrating and making decisions
- Difficulty enjoying regular activities that used to give pleasure
- Feelings of worthlessness, helplessness, hopelessness, or guilt
- Loss of appetite
- Sleeping problems
- Loss of sexual desire

If you are experiencing any of the above problems, which may also be symptoms of depression, see your doctor.

HOW TO MINIMIZE STRESSES OF PARENTING:

- Share household responsibilities and chores with other members of the household (spouse, partner, even older children when appropriate).
- Set realistic rules for children and stick by them.
- Try to maintain a fairly regular schedule for children, including set meal times and bed times.
- Have realistic expectations of your children's behavior and respect their individuality.
- Don't sweat the small stuff. Many little problems and mistakes that children make are not worth getting upset over — just let them go.

WHERE TO GO FOR HELP:

- See your physician if you are having serious difficulty dealing with stress
- Create a network of caring friends
- Contact local mental health services
- Contact your local religious organization to ask about counseling services
- Contact local family services agencies

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- American Academy of Pediatrics (Send a SASE to: *Child Care: What's Best for Your Family?* Attn: Publications Department HE0028 141 Northwest Point Blvd. Elk Grove Village, IL 60007-1098 or www.aap.org)
- National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies Child Care Aware: 800/424-2246
- Parents Anonymous 909/621-6184 or www.parentsanonymous-natl.org

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To find this and previous *JAMA* Patient Pages, check out the AMA's Web site at www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm.

Additional Sources: American Academy of Pediatrics, AMA's Family Medical Guide, AMA's Complete Guide to Women's Health

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