

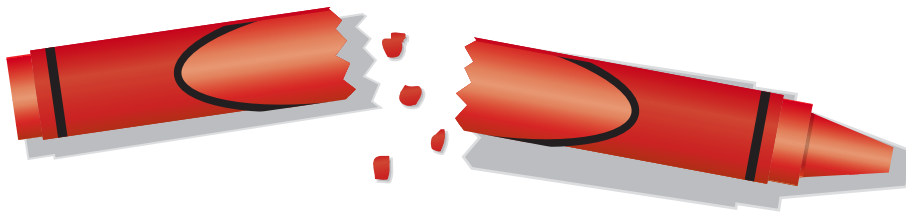
# Stresses of parenting

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](http://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](http://www.parentsanonymous-natl.org)

## INFORM YOURSELF:

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

Brian P. Pace, MA, Writer

Richard M. Glass, MD, Editor

Jeff Molter, Director of Science News

The *JAMA* Patient Page is a public service of *JAMA* and the AMA. The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in most instances; but they are not a substitute for medical diagnosis. For specific information concerning your personal medical condition, *JAMA* and AMA suggest that you consult your physician. This page may be reproduced noncommercially by physicians and other health care professionals to share with patients. Any other reproduction is subject to AMA approval. Bulk reprints available by calling 212/354-0050.

