

Chapter 3

Getting Your Hands in the Game

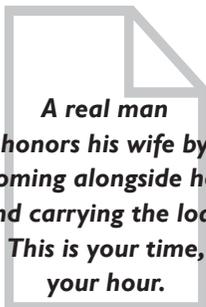
► Think back to my friend Dave who just found out his wife is pregnant. One of his big questions and a question of most men whose wives are pregnant is *what should I be doing?* The answer is easy: plenty.

Pregnancy is not a time for you to put your feet up, kick back for nine months, and wait for the timer to go off to get the baby out of the oven. This is the time for you to get up and get your hands in the game. In the last chapter we have covered what you need to be doing mentally. Now we will dig into what you need to be doing physically to ensure your success as a father and husband. Your wife needs you more than ever, so get your butt in gear.

Report for Duty

After you digest this material, the first thing you will want to do is sit down with your wife (again) and talk about how you can help and why you want to. These are new times for her as well and it may add to her stress if you dive into household duties or baby projects she was managing without talking it through first.

Your wife may feel her own challenge to “do it all.” She may feel the pull to smoothly handle her own career, manage the house, perform her other life duties, and prepare for the arrival of a child all at the same time. So during your sit down conversa-



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tion, acknowledge that she is capable of doing it all quite nicely. But then tell her how important it is for you to be involved as well in every phase. You want to build some good habits and routines during pregnancy that will carry on after it gets totally crazy when the baby arrives. Tell her you want her to be able to get some extra rest during pregnancy and you want her to have time to

read and prepare. You want to help her carry the load. She will appreciate your support and your willingness to try new things to help.

There are a number of ways Super Dad can pitch in and help. For example, each couple is different in how they handle the household tasks of cooking, cleaning, laundry, shopping, paying bills, and running errands. It’s great if you are already involved in some or all of these areas. The goal is to not only keep up what you have been doing but also to relieve your wife of some of her routine tasks partially or altogether.

I have seen some men stop cold at the point of jumping in to help. Why? Many are worried they will somehow be surrendering their manhood if they cook dinner, clean a toilet, or write a thank-you note. They think it somehow degrades or diminishes their roar or their style as a man. You need to get over that. A real man honors his wife by coming alongside her and carrying the load. This is your time, your hour. Remember, you are trying to take some of those sharp corners off of your wife’s daily load so she is rested and less stressed during this important time of carrying your baby. This is a time for leadership, strength, and taking on new challenges—

all things men are built for. So roll up your sleeves and let's see where you can get your hands in the game.

The Mess Hall

Keeping meals on the table for your wife, yourself, and your growing family can be time consuming. As men, we bring a wide variety of experience into the kitchen. Some men are already regularly preparing meals and cleaning up. Others might not know how to turn on an oven or how to wash dishes. Wherever you are on the scale the good news is this; there is plenty to do at all levels and you are capable of doing it!

While schedules and lifestyles for couples vary, it seems the big meal to handle for most is the evening dinner. Breakfast and lunch are usually easier to handle with cereal, sandwiches, and other grab and go type food. But the evening meal is the traditional time to sit down with a hot plate of food and be together as a family. As your children grow you will want to strive to make the evening dinner a consistent family event that pulls everyone together. Studies show that families who routinely eat together have better communication, better relationships, and better marriages.

Your mission, my good man, is to take responsibility for cooking at least some of these meals. If you are already in this mode, great, keep it up. If this is new ground for you, work with your wife on it. Tell her you want to help and you want to learn some new skills. You want her to take some time off from the kitchen. In our house, for example, I take on the task of preparing dinner two nights a week. I usually accomplish this by preparing a large main course the first night and then we reheat the leftovers the second night. So, one round of cooking covers two meals.

What do you cook, how do you cook, and when do you find time to do it? The key to these questions and achieving success in

the kitchen can be found in one word: recipes. These little instruction manuals have been used for centuries to feed the world but are often forgotten by men. A good recipe can be your ticket to stardom. Start looking for these gems and you will see they are everywhere—on soup cans, in newspapers, and even in your mom’s head. You may want to pick your wife’s brain for her favorites or break new ground on your own. Look at some cookbooks or tap your friends for some of their favorites as well. Keep the following tips in mind as you go:

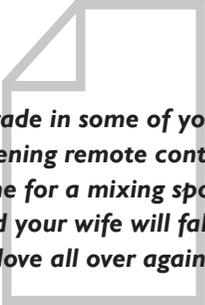
- ¹ Stick with foods both you and your wife enjoy. If she isn’t crazy about lamb or salmon, don’t try to convert her now.
- ¹ Pick recipes with a limited number of ingredients and that consist of things you have at home or you can easily find at the store.
- ¹ The kitchen can be frustrating if you don’t love being there. Keep your creations tasty but quick and simple to make.
- ¹ Pick recipes and dishes that can be built ahead of time and put in the refrigerator before cooking. The first person home can pop it in the oven. Or use a crock-pot you plug in before you head to work in the morning.
- ¹ Plan well balanced meals. Remember your wife needs all the right foods now more than ever. Include salads, fruits, vegetables, and whole-wheat bread to round out your main course.
- ¹ Have fun and surprise your wife with some awesome dinners.

Time in a Bottle

One of the big challenges in meal prep is finding the time to do it. Depending on your work schedule, it may be impossible to invest an hour in putting dinner together right before it is time to

eat. And if you have been working all day you probably aren't in the mood to do it joyfully. I highly recommend you do much of your cooking in off hours, when you first get up in the morning or before you go to bed at night. The refrigerator can be your best friend.

I do some of my best creations at 5:00 in the morning before anyone else in the house is up. Keep in mind these have to be quiet creations; no banging the pots and pans, cursing, or loud chopping is allowed. If your recipes require this, then you may want to prepare them before everyone goes to bed in the evening. Trade in some of your evening remote control time for a mixing spoon and your wife will fall in love all over again.



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Your goal in all this is to come up with four or five plays in the kitchen you can execute well. Do one a week and make it large enough to cover two nights. Of course you can adjust as necessary to fit your schedules. The most important thing is to make the effort. If you do, your wife will see your hands in the game and appreciate your support.

Clean It

Now that you have a big mess in the kitchen it is time to clean it up. Under no circumstance should you make one of your award winning dinners without putting things away and cleaning up. Washing dishes is usually one of the least favorite household chores. The good news is that many homes have an appliance called a dishwasher to handle much of the dirty work. So load it up and stop complaining. If you don't have a dishwasher stand at the sink and knock it out. Make sure to put things back in their proper place. If the kitchen adventure is new to you this is no time

to reorganize things—your wife’s stress levels will definitely go up if you do.

Speaking of dish washing, this may be one corner of your household you can permanently adopt. It has been for me. During one of our pregnancies I noticed this routine chore was something I could do to take the edge off of my wife’s workload. So I became the point man on loading and unloading the dishwasher every day. Both my wife and I put things in as they are used throughout the day. Before going to bed in the evening I make sure all the day’s remaining dishes are loaded. I put in the soap and set the delay timer to run at night while everyone is sleeping. Before I go to work in the morning I unload it and put everything away. I also load any dirty dishes from the morning breakfast. As your family grows you will have more and more dishes to clean each day so the time involved increases slightly. This is part of getting up earlier each day to get all your chores done. My wife enjoys having this routine task off of her own to-do list.

This particular dishwasher regimen, just like all of your other routines, may need to be adjusted for your schedule and lifestyle. For example, you might need to run the dishwasher during the day instead if it is too loud or it fits your schedule better than a night run. The point is to take this daily task on your shoulders and relieve your wife of it. Remember also that if you sign up for duty you need to stick with it. Don’t do it for a week or two and then start to conveniently forget about it. This will do more harm than good, so hang tough and be dependable.

Once you have kitchen clean up mastered, you will want to talk with your wife about other cleaning duties you can handle in the house. Here is a list of some things you might be able to help with:

- ¹ Vacuuming, mopping, and floor cleaning
- ¹ Dusting and wiping down
- ¹ Picking up and putting things away

- ¹ Taking out the trash
- ¹ Bathroom cleaning: tubs, showers, sinks, toilets, and floors
- ¹ Laundry: washing, drying, ironing, and putting away
- ¹ Making beds and changing bedding.

Cleaning a house may or may not be your cup of tea. I have heard many men say “no way” to helping clean or “it doesn’t bother me” when the house gets out of order. Don’t fall into this macho trap. Get over it and figure out where you can get involved.

For those needing some ideas on what to do and how to do it refer to the “How To Clean a House” power module at the back of this book. It will give you some great pointers on how to do a great job and how to get it done *FAST*. If your wife happens to be doing most of the cleaning chores now, another option is to follow her around the house and see how she likes to clean it.

Figure out together where you can carry some of the cooking and cleaning load in your home. Pregnancy is a great time to get into this kind of habit. When the baby arrives you will both have less free time so make sure you stick with your commitment of doing your chores on time. Don’t be a flash in the pan and just do it once or twice and then “forget” about it. There is no better way to honor your wife than to clean her bathroom or build killer lasagna on a regular basis.

Other Household Duties

In addition to cooking and cleaning, there are other routine household duties where you can lend a hand if you aren’t already. These include:

- ¹ Grocery shopping
- ¹ Bill paying and money management

- ¹ Errand running
- ¹ Pet care
- ¹ Home maintenance

One of my favorite tasks to share with my wife is grocery shopping. I enjoy making a list of what we need including the ingredients for my latest dinner masterpiece. I also like to buy fun stuff and surprise her with things we might not get every day, such as ice cream cones, a special coffee flavor, or some great bagels for breakfast. So don't be afraid to go to the store and be creative.



The key here is commitment. If you say you are going to do something, do it.

Depending on your household you or your wife may be the exclusive bill payer or you may be sharing the task. If she is carrying some of this load see if you can relieve her. Money matters will be covered in more detail in the next chapter, but see if there is an opportunity for you to help. The key here is commitment. If you say you are going to do something, do it. If you are going to pay the water and electricity bills, do it. Having your utilities turned off because you forgot to pay the bill will not make a pregnant woman happy or decrease her stress levels. If you need some kind of calendar or reminder system to help you, get it and use it.

Another area you might be able to help your wife is running errands. See if you can handle some of the post office, bank, cleaners, or other places she might need to go. Work these into your regular day before or after work or on your lunch break. If you have pets, make sure you are taking on some of the responsibility for their care.

Maintenance around the house is a great place to help out, especially in the area I call “annoyance elimination.” Every home, apartment, or car has those little things that for one reason or

another go unaddressed. This might include a leaky faucet, a light switch that doesn't work, or a mystery noise in the car. My wife and I experienced a great example. For years we used a coffee pot with a bad design that leaked every time you poured out a cup of coffee. This required us to keep a wet cloth handy to wipe up after every cup of coffee. We both took great joy in finally getting rid of this annoying piece of junk and buying a coffee pot that didn't leak.

You know what the little annoyances are in your own life. Be done with them. Fixing them now during pregnancy is a great way to show some love to your wife and help take some stress out of her day and yours.

Shopping for Baby

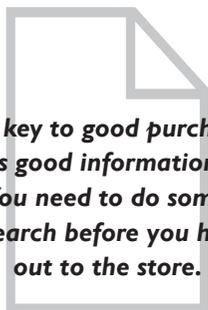
Babies require a lot of gear. Before your baby arrives you will acquire everything from the tiniest socks you have ever seen to substantial pieces of furniture. Here are ten of the more costly items you may need to get:

1. Crib
2. Crib mattress, bedding, and bumper pads
3. Diaper changing table
4. Baby monitor
5. Car seat(s) and baby carrier
6. Baby swing
7. Portable playpen
8. Stroller
9. Highchair
10. Video camera

There are several ways to acquire all this equipment. Some of it you may already own. Some may be given or loaned to you by

friends or relatives. You may get some as gifts and you will probably have to buy some. Most people get their arsenal through a combination of these sources.

It is likely you and your wife will have to go shopping for some of these items and decide what to buy. If you are lucky enough to have a baby shower, you will hopefully get to pick out and register



for the exact items you want. You or your wife may know exactly the brand or look of the items you desire. This is a fun time. But if you don't have clear vision, sometimes it can be hard to sort through it all and decide what to buy.

Numerous brands and designs exist in every product category. Take car seats, for example. You can choose from dozens of models. Different designs, brand names, colors, options, and weight ranges can make the first-time buyer's head spin. Interpretation: this can be a stressful time for your wife.

So how can you help? The key, my friend, to good purchases is good information. You need to do some research before you head out to the store. The great news is that there are several places you can get super product advice. Start by asking friends and family with little ones what they like about their various gear choices. Then blend that with one of the various online tools to get another angle.

One of my favorite product information sources is Consumer Reports. In addition to a great monthly magazine, they have an even better website (consumereports.org) to research everything from soap to strollers, cars to camcorders, and diapers to dryers. It costs only a few dollars for a year's subscription. You can easily make the cost up on your first purchase by being better informed and knowing which products are the best values for the money. They don't accept outside advertising and they thoroughly test

every product for you. They also teach you the specific lingo that applies to each product and what you need to know to make the best purchase. Good stuff.

In the end your great information may still lose out to the product that is the cutest, but at least you will know how it compares. So talk with your wife about what purchase or registry items you might want to research. Remember to think into the future as well. Is it possible you will be having more children down the road? If so you might want to get big items like car seats and beds that are more gender neutral in color and design. You don't want to put your brand new strapping baby boy into his older sister's pink car seat, right? You also might want to consider if the car seat and stroller system you buy today is compatible with a double stroller you might have to buy in the future. So dive in, do some research, and think it through. When you head to the stores you and your wife will be less stressed and ready to do battle.

Building and Organizing

Having a baby means Dad gets to put stuff together. Lots of it. Beds, toys, strollers, bookshelves—you name it. So, break out your screwdrivers and your patience; there is lots of work to do.

Some guys like the challenge of tackling boxes of crazy looking parts and building a masterpiece. Others among us are not as excited. Whatever your feelings, take on the job with a joyful heart. Remember these are things for your new baby. So take your time and do a good job.

One tip you will want to keep in mind is your wife's vision for a particular project. Don't let things sit too long while you keep promising to get to it next weekend. That can create stress for everyone. Ask your wife when you are unloading the big project from the car when she would like to have it completed and then agree on a time. She may be fine with a few weeks in some cases,

but other times she may want the piece built now. Be patient and work it out.

Here are a few tips to help you keep your sanity in the building and organizing phase:

- ¹ Establish a file or file box to organize all the owner's manuals, assembly instructions, and receipts. Then when you have a question about the video camera or need to order a replacement part for your stroller years down the road, you will know where to go.
- ¹ Save time by setting up a small toolbox for home use and keep it separate from your main tool collection. Keep a pair of pliers, an adjustable wrench, a hammer, and a couple of screwdrivers in it. Also a few Ziploc sandwich bags are great for storing any extra parts.
- ¹ Label and store leftover paint in a safe place. I guarantee your two-year-old will decide to do some decorating of their own on your walls. You will need those leftover paint supplies to cover their creations.

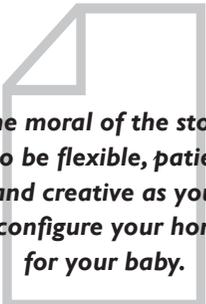
Flip This Room

One big hands-in-the-game project may be the establishment of a baby nursery in your home. Chances are if this is the first baby to arrive at your house you don't have a "cute" and baby friendly room ready to go. There will likely be painting to do, curtains to hang, and more.

My wife and I went through this exercise right before the arrival of our first child. Our first home together was a quaint three-bedroom number in a quiet neighborhood. In addition to our bedroom, we had a spare bedroom for guests and I had a home office in the third bedroom. When we started to plan room use with a larger family, the choice was easy for me. The spare bedroom would

go and we would remake it into a nursery. I thought the conversion process would be easy as 1-2-3: (1) remove spare bed, (2) bring in new baby bed, (3) return to couch and watch football.

My wife had a much different vision. You see what I hadn't counted on was *which* room she envisioned the nursery occupying. That room was where my home office was. According to my wife it had the better windows, ceiling height, and layout. She was right; that room was beautiful. I had a big cozy chair, a big beautiful desk with plenty of room to work, and a deer head on the wall. A man's paradise now captured. After some debate and foot dragging on my part, I agreed to relocate my office (and the deer head) to the spare bedroom. Junior would take over the old office room as his nursery. Leadership and love at work.



The moral of the story is to be flexible, patient, and creative as you reconfigure your home for your baby.

When it came time to move the big beautiful desk to the other room, we ran into a challenge. You see I built the desk from a kit, and I built it in the room. Wouldn't you know the desk was too big to fit through the door? And it was glued, screwed, and nailed together quite well, thank you. There was no taking this desk apart again. My office was saved! The baby would have to go in the spare room after all, right?

My favorite video footage of our first pregnancy is me in my office, sawing three inches off the bottom of my big beautiful desk! The moral of the story is to be flexible, patient, and creative as you reconfigure your home for your baby. It all worked out for me and it will for you too. Have fun and enjoy the move.

Baby Correspondence

Having a baby requires a good amount of written correspondence. There can be lots of baby announcements to send, thank

you notes to write, envelopes to address, and more. This is another area where Dad can lend a helping hand.

Work with your wife and see where a lumberjack can help. If writing a thank you note for a pretty blanket is not your forte, see if you can handle the envelope chores. Writing out addresses and sticking stamps can be one of those little things that helps take the edge off of your wife's workload. Make it a fun team project as you sit around the kitchen table and work on it together. It's a great time to talk about all of the other baby topics.

Here are some additional ideas for helping with correspondence:

- ¹ If you are handy with the computer and spreadsheets, make an address database of all family and friends. That way you can quickly generate mailing labels for thank you notes, invitations, announcements, and Christmas cards.
- ¹ Buy a spiral notebook and start a thank you note log of who got you what gift. This will help you make sure nothing slips through the cracks. Make sure you take this to the hospital so you can record gifts and flowers that arrive there.
- ¹ Volunteer to be the stamp buyer and the guy who gets the correspondence to the mailbox.

One last word of advice on correspondence: if you volunteer to help, make sure you get your job done on time. Ahead of time would be even better. You don't want your wife's stack of completed notes waiting on you to fill out the envelopes. Get in there and get it done. Remember, leadership and love.

Let's Get 'er Done

So, when are you going to do all of this cooking, cleaning, shopping, errand running, building, organizing, and envelope licking?

On your lunch break. Before you go to bed. Early in the morning (my personal favorite). Whenever you can. The important thing is to adjust your schedule, get in there, start doing some new things, and stick to your commitments.

One of my favorite movie classics is *Top Gun* starring Tom Cruise. In part of the movie, hotshot Navy pilot Maverick, played by Cruise, is emotionally lost after losing his partner Goose in a plane crash. Maverick can't seem to let his old life go; he keeps holding on to Goose—even physically holding onto his dog tags. When new tests and battles come up Maverick won't get in the game. In pilot terms, he won't *engage*. He is stalled with all kinds of excuses: the timing isn't right, the set up isn't perfect, and the people around him aren't perfect. Not until he lets a piece of his old life go (Goose) does he finally grab the new situations and challenges and get after them.

Just like Maverick, you must engage in the battle at hand: getting things done. Don't be paralyzed by how and when you have done things in the past. Don't wait for the perfect time or situation. Your wife needs a fully engaged partner with head and hands in the game. And she needs it now. Get in there “Mav” and get it done.

Chapter Prayer

FATHER, bless my body and my hands to take on extra work and responsibility during this time. Bless me with new skills and the ability to get things done. Let each hour of sleep I get be doubled in its rejuvenating strength. Let my wife be more relaxed as we prepare our home and our lives for this child. Bless the health and spirit of each member of this growing family. In the name of the one who engages with us in all things big and small, **AMEN**.

Wisdom to Consider

“There are risks and costs to a program of action. But they are far less than the long-range risks and costs of comfortable inaction.”

JOHN F. KENNEDY



You must get in the game. You are a man—you are built for this. Engage!



CHAPTER CHECKLIST

- Have a healthy conversation with your wife about things you can do around the house to help. Explain that you want to help and want to take on some new tasks to help lighten the load for her.
- Find some recipes you can handle in the kitchen. Run them by your wife and see if they sound good to her. Perfect a few and make them regularly.
- Become “Captain of the Dishwasher.” Load it at night and unload it in the morning. If you don’t have a dishwasher, make sure you have washed and put away everything before heading out to work each day.
- Talk with your wife and assume at least one regular household cleaning task if not more. If the bathroom is yours to handle, strive to do it with excellence. Do it fast, do it regularly, and do it with a smile.
- Pick out some other household chores you can do on a regular basis, such as errand running or grocery shopping. Keep your commitments and have fun with them.
- Eliminate the small annoyances in your home like leaky faucets, squeaky doors, clutter, and things that don’t work.
- Research some of your bigger baby purchases, such as car seats, video cameras, and strollers. Have the information with you when you head to the store or shop online.
- Subscribe to Consumer Reports online version at www.consumerreports.org.

- ❑ Get new purchases or gifts put together quickly. Set up a file box for manuals and organize your toolbox.
- ❑ Help your wife “build” the nursery area of your home. Be flexible and open-minded. Remember to properly store and label those leftover paint supplies.
- ❑ Help your wife with the baby correspondence of thank you notes, announcements, and envelopes. Get your assignments and finish them ahead of the agreed upon deadline.
- ❑ Try new things. Partner with your wife and find out where you can get your hands in the game on a regular basis. Insist that you help. Take the edges off of her task load. Engage!