



## Parenting

# How becoming a parent really changes you

*It's hard to imagine how becoming a mum makes you different over the years, but motherhood touches every aspect of your life*

### THE MATTER IN YOUR BRAIN ALTERS

Becoming a parent literally changes your brain. Researchers have found that brain scans show how there is a decrease of grey matter in the brains of new mums - but this has nothing to do with memory or intelligence or getting rid of brain cells. Rather it's linked to how the mum may learn to empathise with and subsequently care for her newborn and the changes can prevail for up to two years. Pregnant women often find that they become more emotionally charged but this research may reveal an evolutionary link in the role of attachment as it suggests that the changes that occur in the female brain, where other brain cells come into play in the reorganisation, may help a mother understand the needs of her new baby so that she can respond in the right way. Researchers likened the brain changes to the ones that occur in the developing teenage brain. The brain changes only occurred in mums, and not dads, suggesting that there is a biological and hormonal link.

### YOU BECOME MORE STRESSED

Mums, research has found, may be more stressed out than dads too. Not because they're less able to handle parenting issues, but because in general they have largely more to deal with. The research from Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, surveyed more than 12,000 parents and found that mothers spend largely more time with their children while getting on with repetitive chores, have less leisure time available to them, and do more things with the kids that aren't related to having fun, which all has a bearing on their overall wellbeing.

### YOU CAN MULTITASK MORE THAN YOU THOUGHT POSSIBLE

Women are the recognised multi-taskers, and research has established that working mums spend an extra 10.5 hours compared to working dads, every week multitasking at home. The hours between 5pm and 8pm

were found to be the busiest, with mums' brains zip-wiring between homework, afterschool activities, dinner, cleaning up and bedtime routine. There is a massive downside to juggling so many different demands. As a result of increased multitasking, mothers unsurprisingly reported feeling more overwhelmed. As a mother's multitasking is generally carried out over a number of hours, it's arguably too much for the brain which goes into stress mode, which explains why you may finally explode into rage or break down in tears.

### IT CAN AFFECT HOW YOU WORK

If the views of over two thirds of working Irish mothers are anything to go by, you can 'have it all' and juggle the work/life balance successfully. The recruitment company Osborne surveyed 926 working women, with almost half working 40 hours a week. But 80 per cent of those surveyed believe that having children affects how women participate in the workforce while 64 per cent stated that having a family hampers a women's career progression with 47 per cent believing that being a working mother and of a certain age (56 per cent) affects that likelihood of landing a dream job. And almost half of those surveyed have never asked for a pay rise or promotion.

Shona McManus, CEO of Osborne, said: "There are a number of working mothers on our Osborne team, with several of them working four day weeks. This does not stop them achieving what others achieve in a five day week. I believe this is down to higher productivity levels, higher efficiency in business, being more focused and being able to prioritise, which proves it is possible to balance motherhood and a career. I myself am a single working mother and believe that we can have it all. It comes down to focusing on what is important, being efficient, having good childcare and having a stress outlet (for



instance I run). Then it is possible to be the best mum, best businesswoman and best work colleague you can be. I recommend offering flexibility to all of your team, not just working mums (or dads). Take a more rounded approach and offer flexibility where you can."

### YOUR LIBIDO NEVER LIES

You may expect your sex life to change after you have a child, only you're not sure how. But the Maternal health and maternal morbidity in Ireland (MAMMI) study from Trinity College found that the figure of 51 per cent of mothers who claimed to be 'very satisfied' with their sex life pre-pregnancy, dropped to 24 per cent in the 12 months after having a baby. A year after the birth 39 per cent of mums claimed they had less interest in sex after the birth and there were a range of sexual health issues from painful penetration, difficulty reaching orgasm and vaginal dryness. Couple that with a natural drop in testosterone in new dads within the first year of a child's birth and a more substantial drop in this hormone in dads who take on childcare, and it's no wonder your sex life may take a backseat. But it's not all doom and gloom - one UK parenting website survey (Channel Mum) on 1,000 parents revealed that ultimately your sex life improves after you have children, with 64 per cent of men claiming to prefer their partner's post birth body and 83 per cent of parents happily focussing on 'quality' rather than quantity. Overall the survey found that 94 per cent of parents are satisfied with their sex lives. **WW**