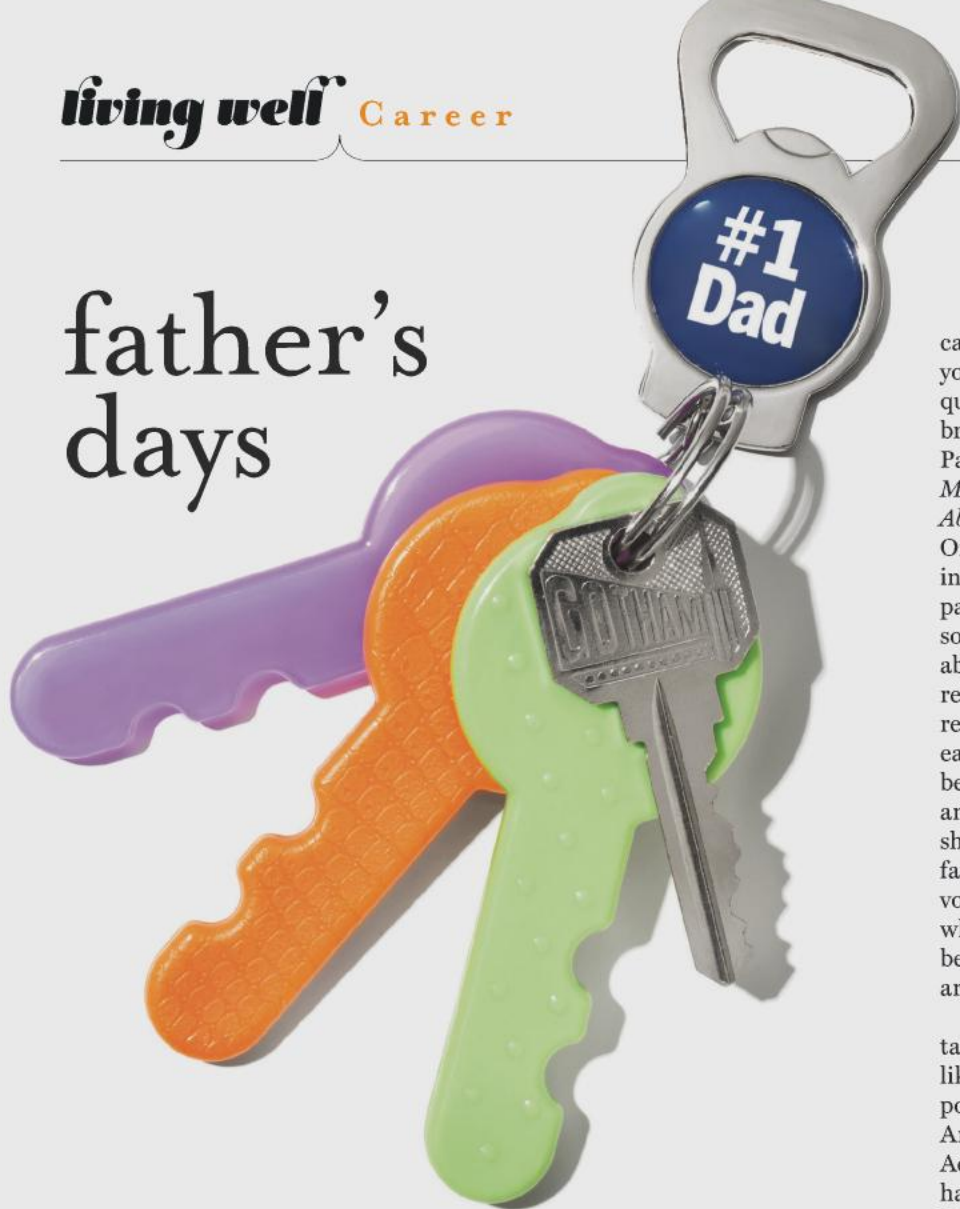


# father's days



Surprise! If you live in the U.S., your partner is entitled to the same post-baby leave as you—but most guys aren't taking their due time. Here's how to make it happen, plus the surprising ways paternity leave delivers perks to the whole family.

**Y**ou know when something's simultaneously shocking and obvious? Brace yourself: The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which entitles most new moms to 12 weeks off work within Baby's first year, promises the same time off to dads (and in some cases, same-sex spouses, too). That means your S.O. can be home with you in those first all-absorbing months, or take over when you go back to work—hi, 24 weeks of zero day care.

If paternity leave has never crossed your mind (beyond a few

vacation days after the baby arrives), you're not alone. And don't be surprised if your partner's human resources rep hasn't clued him in: 1 in 5 HR professionals in the U.S. is confused about the policy, according to a recent study from Boston College. Yipes!

Like maternity leave, dad's hiatus is usually unpaid. But if you can swing it (read on to learn how!), the mental and physical benefits paid out to your entire clan will be colossal.

## For a baby, early time with Pops is linked to better cognitive development.

While pregnancy and labor trigger caregiving instincts in moms (thank you, oxytocin!), a father needs quality time with his kiddo for his brain to shift into daddy mode, says Paul Raeburn, author of *Do Fathers Matter? What Science Is Telling Us About the Parent We've Overlooked*. One recent study found that tuning into his infant's cries connects pathways in Dad's brain related to social perception, bolstering his ability to forge and maintain relationships (a boon when he returns to work). For the little guy, early time with Pops is linked to better cognitive development. In another study, 6-month-olds who shared regular playtime with their fathers had more advanced vocabularies by age 3 than those who played only with mom, possibly because dads drop bigger words around bub.

For you: Women whose husbands take time off right away are less likely to be depressed three months post-birth, Spanish researchers note. And a 2014 study from the National Academy of Sciences found that having a partner at home boosts Mom's hormone levels of prolactin and oxytocin, stimulating breast milk production and letdown.

Paternity leave can do great things for your marriage, too, as Jim Stokes-Buckles can attest. The Massachusetts father of two took two months off after his first baby. "It gave me a feeling of equal partnership with my wife," he says. "I know I can do anything she can do with regard to the kids."

So, how can you make this magical time happen for your little

tribe? Sidestep the four biggest stumbling blocks using this advice from experts and dads who made it work. We can't promise it'll be easy, but we guarantee it'll be worth it.

STUMBLING BLOCK

**WE CAN'T AFFORD IT**

It's terrible, but true: Women earn only 76.5 cents for every dollar a man does, so going without Papa's paycheck may be a hardship. Add a tot who can set you back \$14,700 per year, and it's no wonder that five out of six fathers in the Boston College study said they would take time off only if they were paid at least 70 percent of their salary.

That figure (or more!) doesn't have to be a pipe dream. About a fifth of U.S. employers offer paid paternity leave, and this number is expected to rise as Silicon Valley sets a national example: Yahoo now gives eight paid weeks; Facebook offers four months. Your guy should research benefits at his competitors and use them as leverage to push for similar perks, says Delta Emerson, EVP and chief of staff at Ryan, a tax services firm that instated more flexible parental leave. You can also check your state's laws at NCSL.org (navigate to "Employee Leave" under "Labor and Employment").

Another selling point for your partner to present to his boss: Offering paid paternity leave may improve a company's bottom line. Revenue and employee and client satisfaction all went up when Ryan implemented better work-life

policies, while staff turnover decreased, Emerson says. If your guy is wary to advocate for change solo, he can start a fathers' group at the office—about 13 percent of companies surveyed by Boston College had one—to make the case together. Power in numbers!

If work's not budging on money, turn negotiations to time. Since paternity leave is more about bonding than recovering, many dads stagger their unpaid weeks, which may be easier financially than going three straight months sans pay. Or, consider just six weeks of leave for Dad. It'll slash the hit to the family bank account in half while still giving him invaluable hours with your new nugget.

STUMBLING BLOCK

**HE'S WORRIED ABOUT WORK**

When New York Mets second baseman Daniel Murphy missed opening day of the 2014 season to take paternity leave, radio host Mike Francesca ribbed, "You're a major-league baseball player—you can hire a nurse." Um, *what?*

Sadly, Murphy's not alone. "Men are punished more harshly than women if they take time away from work," says Tom Spiggle, an employment lawyer in Arlington, Va.

Sure enough, caregiving fathers experience more mistreatment than their childless peers, finds a study from the University of Toronto.

Ben Eggleston, an auto insurance representative and new dad in Irvine, Calif., took his 12 weeks of FMLA leave to the tune of "friendly teasing from people at work, like 'Must be nice getting all this time off to sit home and relax,'" he says. But even a gentle jab may make a man question his decision. Tell hubs to take a cue from Murphy, who struck back with this one-liner: "Long after they tell me I am not good enough to play baseball anymore, I'll be a husband and a father."

Another problem: Your partner's co-workers may not respect his time off. "I had this romantic idea of paternity leave—that he'd be home with me and we'd swap who got up in the night," says Allison Evans, a new mom in Ohio, whose husband, Dave, took time off when their daughter was born. "But the people he worked with were like, 'You have a baby! Congrats—here's a gift card. Now can you come to this meeting?'" There's also pressure to be online: 45 percent of dads surveyed by Boston College checked email regularly while on leave.

To prevent getting glued to his laptop, your guy should discuss his



Not pictured: the negotiating tools he'll need to score paid leave.



He's adding the dad card to this mix—make sure his boss knows it.

leave with management as early as possible, Spiggle says. Battle pushback by presenting a list of accomplishments, adds Scott J. Behson, Ph.D., an associate professor at Fairleigh Dickinson University and founder of the blog [FathersWorkandFamily.com](http://FathersWorkandFamily.com). Remember, at the end of the day, you're legally entitled to the time!

In the case of requesting extras, such as staggered weeks off, a dad-to-be should define a plan of how he'll meet responsibilities, says Chris Duchesne, VP of global workplace solutions for [Care.com](http://Care.com): "Focus on measurable goals and the company's needs, not your own. How will this be a win for them?"

But sometimes, a dad's worst enemy is himself—especially if he's passionate about his job. As a surgeon, Dave Evans worked as many as 90 hours a week before his daughter was born. "All of a sudden there's this other more important thing in your life, and it's hard to adjust," he says. To help: Hubs can ask a work buddy to call with big news, so he'll feel connected without spiraling into an email black hole.

**STUMBLING BLOCK**  
**WE CAN'T AGREE ON WHEN HE TAKES LEAVE**

You've figured out how to make paternity leave work—congrats! Now the question is when, since FMLA leave can occur anytime in Baby's

first year. The optimal strategy, says *No Regrets Parenting* author Harley Rotbart, M.D., is to divide leave: a couple of weeks at birth, when moms need the most help; a few around three months, when mom usually goes back to work; and the rest between six and nine months, when babies interact more and become even more fun to be around.

You could also try scheduling some overlap. Eggleston's first week of paternity leave was his wife's last. "It cost a little more—we had to put our baby in day care one week sooner than if we had completely divided our leave," he says. "But it meant we could spend time together as a family." Whatever happens, fathers should be there for the first few days after delivery—and you should both resist the urge to invite everyone and their dog over for ogling. "Ideally Mom and Dad have a few days together to just figure it out, have fun and explore how to handle the baby," says Paula Levy, a licensed family therapist in Westport, Conn.

**STUMBLING BLOCK**  
**I'M HAVING TROUBLE HANDING BABY OVER**

It's normal if the thought of surrendering baby duties, even to your mate, has you breaking into a cold sweat. Behaviorists call it "maternal gatekeeping," and it happens when moms feel subconsciously threatened as caregivers. "I would always be thinking, *You're doing this wrong*," Allison Evans remembers. "I'd come

home and think, *That's a sleeper—she shouldn't be wearing that during the day.*" Resist this urge to nitpick.

"It's really important for mom to encourage dad, rather than insist that there's one right way," Levy says. Reprimanding hubby for using the wrong wipes or some other misdeed that won't actually harm your bambino can make him feel reluctant to pull his weight.

To fight the desire to critique everything your partner is doing (or failing to do!) with Baby, focus on keeping your friendship intact. Levy recommends locking in couple time the way you schedule gym visits: "The greatest gift you can give your kids is a strong marriage."

**10 THINGS HE'LL DO ON PATERNITY LEAVE**

**Jason Good, author of *This Is Ridiculous, This Is Amazing: Parenthood in 71 Lists*, shares what every dad's bound to do at least once during his time off.**

- 1 Test the temperature of a bottle with his tongue.
- 2 Use a baby wipe to clean spit-up out of his slipper.
- 3 Hold a baby while sitting on the toilet.
- 4 Take a nap with a baby on his chest.
- 5 Have a panic attack.
- 6 Become insecure about the vestigial nature of his own nipples.
- 7 Feel guilty for taking a shower.
- 8 Feel guilty for eating.
- 9 Drive to Walgreens at 11 p.m. to exchange a package of Pampers Cruisers for Pampers Swaddlers. At the checkout, buy three Snickers bars and eat them all on the way home. Throw the wrappers away before entering the house.
- 10 Have a dream that he's back at work, sleeping in the fetal position on his desk.