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# PARENTAL GUIDANCE

NEW DAD **MATT MAYNARD** FEARED FOR HIS FITNESS WHEN HIS FIRST CHILD CAME ALONG. SLEEP DEPRIVED, TIME POOR AND JUST A NAPPY CHANGE AWAY FROM A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN CONSPIRE TO MAKE FAR FROM IDEAL CONDITIONS FOR EXERCISE. YET WITH A FEW TWEAKS AND MORE THAN A FEW DOUBLE ESPRESSOS, HE'S FOUND THAT FITNESS AND FATHERHOOD ISN'T SO INCOMPATIBLE AFTER ALL >>



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he test showed a double red stripe. It was positive. In a little less than 270 days I was to begin the biggest endurance event I had ever entered, setting out on the ultra-distance challenge of fatherhood. With my pregnancy-test ticket in hand, I felt like an

imposter. Very little attention seemed to have been given to the curriculum of the applicants. Entry, at least, was initially free. Once it began I was assured there would be regular installments for its duration. Course length was unspecified. Time spent participating was rewarded far more highly than setting a new course record. And there were no drink stops. No medals. No sponsorship. Just relentless rounds of broken sleep, early baths and an "I love daddy" t-shirt decorated with tears and a sprinkling of vomit.

It sounded akin to the kind of stoic next-level endurance feats I would scroll past on social media. So impossibly long and hard that I might linger to press like, but quickly shake my head and assure myself it couldn't possibly be good for you. But here I was. My double red-stripe ticket in hand, and the countdown clock already ticking. Training needed to begin fast. Luck was on my side, though. Like any future-father fanboy, I had reached out to three experts, and they had taken me under their paternal wing. If there was any hope of maintaining fitness whilst being a good dad, I would need every time-bending tip they could spare.

**THE JOURNEY TO THE START LINE**

At 33 years of age I was in reasonably good physical shape. I certainly had my soft spots, however, in organisation and time management. Those Achilles heels would have to be patched up when baby arrived. But right now I needed to understand just what being a dad would be like, and to manage my fitness expectations appropriately. My entire adult life I had been the boss of my own personal time, and I'd spent a lot of it doing sport. Very soon that freedom was about to be reshuffled. And while I hoped I would rise to the challenge and enjoy the new

responsibility, it was clear I needed some help in getting my priorities in order. Did becoming a dad really mean ready meals, swapping bicycles for people carriers and maxing out my heart rate when retrieving that dummy from under the sofa?

**Commando Dad** "When you find out you're going to be a father there is no better time to 'take stock' when it comes to your lifestyle. Ask yourself, 'Am I fit for fatherhood?' It's a tough mission, both physically and mentally. If you're an expectant dad who doesn't really have fitness in your weekly routine, this is a perfect opportunity for it to be introduced. When you've got a baby trooper in your arms on a 2am nocturnal mission, you'll be glad you did!"

**Damian Hall** "Many dads work longer hours when there's an extra mouth to feed, or else take on the burden of sole breadwinner for a while, which can affect both physical and mental health. Getting exercise is probably never more necessary for men but equally never more difficult to find the time to do. The physical benefits help combat the onset of 'dad bod', but there are many mental plus points, too." ➡

**MEET THE EXPERTS**



**NEIL SINCLAIR**

The ex-Royal Engineer Commando has written a series of self-help books for dads. His first book, *Commando Dad: New recruits, a guide to pregnancy and birth for dads-to-be*, is written in no-nonsense military speak. It developed into a series including *Commando Dad: Mission*

*Adventure, get active with your kids*. Currently he's cooking up a recipe book for busy dads who like getting their kids involved.

Commando Dad is father to three children aged 17, 16 and 13. Next March he will attempt to run the infamous 30-mile commando fitness test, some 30 years after he first completed it to earn his green beret. See his work at [commandodad.com](http://commandodad.com).



**ROB KEMP**

Kemp has been writing for 16 years about fitness and fatherhood since the birth of his son. As editor-at-large for a dad's mag called *Father's Quarterly (FQ)* he helped campaign for better paternity leave for UK fathers. He is the author of *The Expectant Dad's Survival Guide* and *The New Dad's Survival Guide*.

Kemp didn't initially increase his fitness regime when he heard the news about fatherhood, but signed up to run the London Marathon when his son needed funds for a Scout trip to the USA. You can follow him @ExpectantDad and learn more at [robkemp.org.uk/fatherhood](http://robkemp.org.uk/fatherhood).



**DAMIAN HALL**

Damian is a GB ultra-runner and UKA Coach, who placed fifth at the 100-mile UTMB running race in 2018. The course straddles the Alps of France, Italy and Switzerland and is widely considered to be the unofficial world championship event of ultra-distance mountain running. He also holds the fastest nappy changing PB since the advent of terry towelling.

Damian is a father to two children aged five and eight, taking on the role at the same time that he discovered the joys of "running long distances in lumpy places". Hall says, "Running is more complementary than most sorts of fitness activities," though he concedes "it's a crap sport for spectators."



**"When you're a dad, getting exercise is probably never more necessary but equally never more difficult to find the time to do"**

➤➤ **NEW RULES OF THE GAME**

Slowly the idea sank in over the next nine months that fatherhood wouldn't be the end of my physical life as I knew it. The tips I had been given so far got me thinking that it could even be a positive thing. Time management had always been a weak point for me. Working from home I was often spoiled for choice with regards to when I'd get my daily endorphin hit. Getting down to the gym, however, had always been difficult. Previously I had lacked the structure and perhaps the discipline to fit it all in.

Our baby came two weeks early. My mates teased me that such an early arrival couldn't possibly be a child of mine. But I had been talking to the experts and I had my strategy ready for improving my previous organisational hiccups. Once those initial fuzzy few days of cooing, cuddling and welling up at the discovery my son had the same dodgy runner's ankles as me, it felt like time to get back out on the workout wagon, testing out my new resolve and expert advice.

**Hall** "Your free time takes a big hit, but it doesn't mean you have to give up on fitness goals. I found when I became a father that I was happier to give up most of my socialising but continue with ultra-running training, because running up and down hills made me happier than swapping bad jokes in a crowded pub. Your time becomes more precious, but you can still train hard if you make sacrifices elsewhere. I might have one window for training each day, so when it creaked open, I grabbed it in a flash, rather than check Instagram one more time."

**Commando Dad** "When I became a first-time dad I started tapping into the skills and tools I had learned as a commando, such as the patience and care I had to show to the Kurdish Refugees while serving in Iraq. I began to see daily admin tasks for looking after my baby trooper as mini missions. I created 'standard operating procedures' (or SOPs) for common tasks, such as changing a nappy, or making up a bottle. 'Preparation and planning prevents poor parental performance' became my morning mantra. Every night before bed I'd have my mini trooper's kit bag up to speed and squared away for the following day's missions."

**“When you've got a baby trooper in your arms at 2am, you'll be glad you incorporated fitness into your weekly routine”**

**TAG-TEAM TACTICS**

As the first three months went by, I found that Hall's opportunism with exercise and Commando Dad's stiff-upper-lip towards the more onerous jobs of fatherhood helped me keep balance both physically and mentally. Between a very messy nappy change and bath time one night, I had signed up for a 100-mile ultra marathon – my longest running challenge yet. Perhaps it was inspired by the interesting new sensation of being somewhat older,

of being second generation and of wanting to see what I still had left in me.

I was running more often than I had in years. I had even started including my son into home workouts. Lifting him during squats would help pacify him if crying (though I can't guarantee this works for every model). Clear and away the biggest success was with my partner. Well, alright, it was of her making. But by being generous enough to allow me to escape and exercise, I felt I had the emotional space to be a better dad on return. In my own way, I hoped that hanging out in the garden with Sam while she went to post-natal exercise classes or jiggling him on my knee (as I finish this paragraph) would partially restore the balance of her extraordinary gift of time. Forging these healthy moments of time spent both with and without one another, and both with and without baby, was the biggest leap we took together as parents.

**Rob Kemp** "Accept that there will be sacrifices. If your partner is home all day with the baby then she'll want time with you in the evening. Going out for a run won't go down well. But taking your running gear to work and getting a 5k in during your lunch hour a couple of times a week can help you keep up the routine without impacting upon your new family life."

**Hall** "Good communication is vital. And I usually wait till my wife is well fed, coffeed and feeling happy before announcing (OK asking) when my next big race is. And I often need to ring-fence some time for her in return (or an expensive holiday of her choosing!). Hopefully your partner will see that if you're happy and healthy it benefits the whole family." 📢



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**ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS FOR TIME-POOR DADS**



**BABY SQUATS**

Hold your 'babybell' weight in front of you with arms extended, then sit down into a squat to create a deep quad and glute strengthening burn. Return to standing position and repeat. The training effect increases as baby gets bigger!

**BABY WEIGHT VEST**

Turn a leisurely family walk into a workout. You'll need a quality and comfortable chest mount for your child.

**THE BUGGY RUN**

Find a quiet, hilly road with a wide pavement, or even better a woodland climb. Run repeats until baby or dad gets tired.

**CAR SEAT CRUNCHES**

Bring your car seat or baby bouncing chair into a clear area when you can perform a sit-up. Orientate baby to face you. It's amazing how much a panting dad will keep baby amused.

**Reasons to be cheerful**

Over three-quarters of men reported positive changes to their health behaviours since becoming fathers, according to 2010 research published by the *International Journal of Men's Health*. "Fatherhood", it concluded "may signal a shift away from individualism and lead to an elimination of negative behaviours, assuming more responsibilities, an increased perception of maturity, and self-reflection that instigates positive behaviour modifications." Becoming a dad was linked with acceptance of greater responsibilities towards families. This sometimes led to men re-establishing a relationship with their doctor and choosing a healthier lifestyle, so that they could accompany their children in games and activities.