

Having a new baby is an unforgettable time. It can be magic. Blissful. And it can be exhausting. Stressful. Sometimes it's all of those things at once. It's a bit like getting married, in that regard. Add some postpartum hormones and a sprinkle of conflicting advice and you have the recipe for what is possibly the most intense chapter in a person's life. Now, after the intensity of getting married, you took time to connect – we call it a honeymoon. It's even more important that new parents take time to connect with Baby. Let's call it your babymoon.

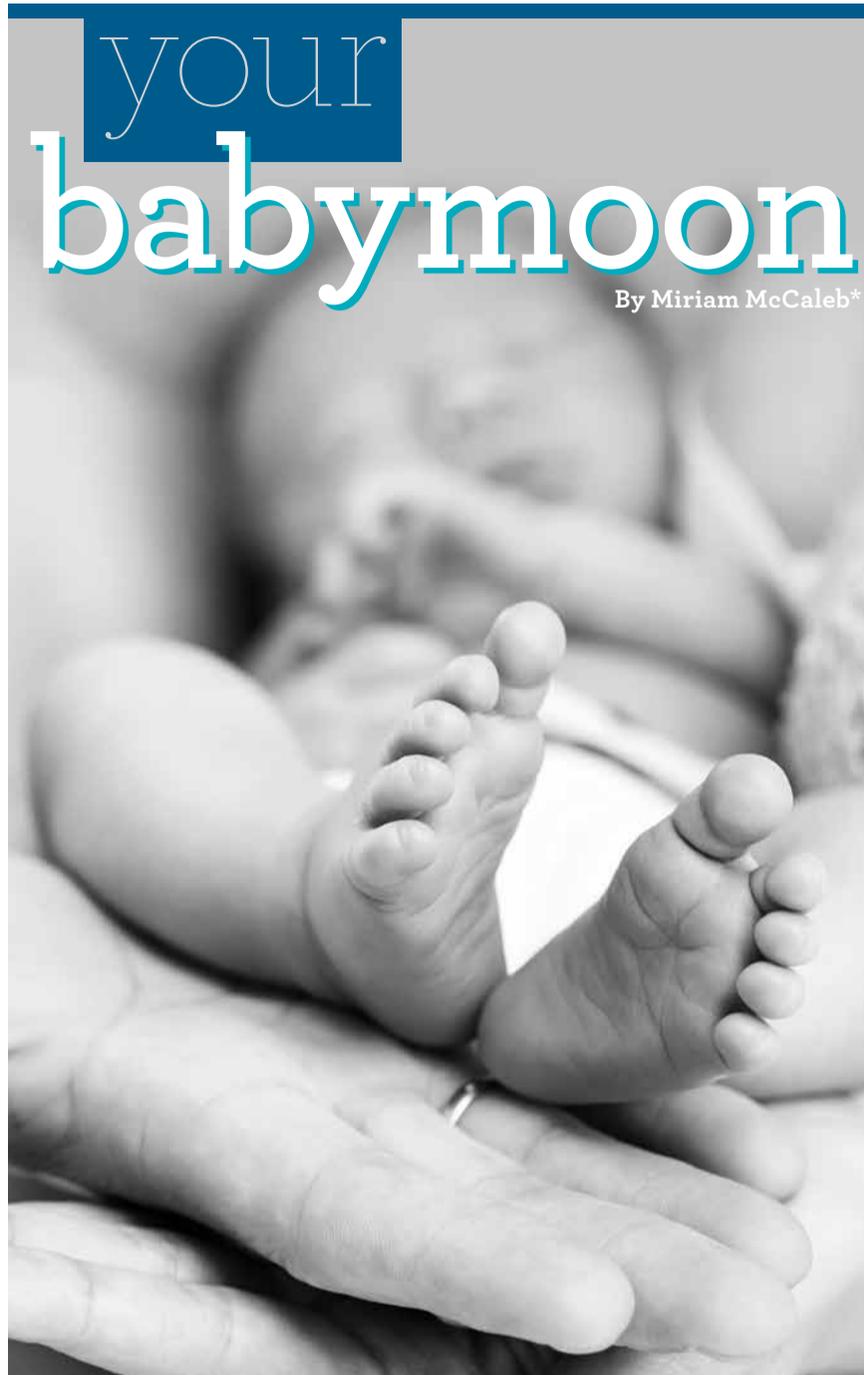
For some people, this is easy: they enjoy putting the world at arm's length, and having a newborn in the house is a wonderful excuse to do so. Like my friend Jan, who put a 'No Visitors' sign on the gate, and a Mama I heard of in Hamilton who surrounded her property in Police 'Do Not Cross' tape to keep people out.

But not everyone automatically craves the babymoon. There are those who'd like a few visitors and an occasional outing. Then there are families who resist the babymoon: they long for their social lives, or the familiarity of work. There are parents who seek visitors – perhaps because they're far from their own families, maybe because they've borne a particularly needy infant.

While babies do have individually varying reactions to the world, we know that newborn babies have distinct physiological needs. Babies do best under pretty consistent conditions, sometimes in opposition to the preferences of their parents.

Consider this: Babies are born with 'immature systems of sensory processing'. This means it's really hard for them to make sense of the barrage of new sounds, new sights and new sensations that exist in the world. I imagine it like this: "The sounds of my family and home are new to me. That's a lot to adjust to. Do I really have to get used to noisy espresso machines and summertime parties as well? I'd like to wait for that if I could please."

Early stuff really matters. Our brains do a lot of organising while we're in-utero, but it's not until we are born that most of the work gets done. We develop intelligence by connecting brain cells, and approximately 85% of cells



The Babymoon is your chance to connect with your baby in those first few weeks and months. Here are some suggestions for prioritising that special time.

connect after birth. We wire up our brains with information we gather from our early relationships and environment. The best brain we are capable of growing is the brain that grows when we're nestled in safe and loving arms. Babies crave a connected relationship with one person first (usually Mama), slowly adding people but always able to refer back to that initial secure relationship.

How, then, do we bridge the gap between what Baby needs (peace, calm, consistency) and what a parent might need?

First, Baby does best when all the adults in his life can allow the primary relationship to be the most important thing. Daddy, Grandpop, Auntie, or whoever is around, will be most helpful if they let Mama concentrate on making milk and the important work of gazing deep into Baby's eyes. Whānau can

spend time with older kids, make cups of tea, keep the housework flowing. Soon enough, Baby can work on his relationship with them, too.

Similarly, when there are visitors, resist letting them hold Baby while you dash about doing jobs. Remember: visits are not about playing 'Pass the Baby'. Who does that serve? Not usually Mama, and it sure ain't Baby. Instead, give the guests the jobs to do, freeing Mama up to attend to Baby. Yes, your towels might get folded wrongly and dishes get put silly places, but it's not forever. And this rich relationship you're building oughta last forever. So go with it.

And what about those parents who will find it easier to transmit feelings of love and calm to their sweet babies if they connect with the pulse of life out in the community?

Lauren Porter, co-founder of the Centre for Attachment, describes it this way: "A visit to a noisy cafe might be just what a mother needs to feel an internal sense of calm." A noisy cafe? That might be what mother needs, but don't Baby's needs come first? Lauren said we can think about this as we would with a couple negotiating. "I want us to do this, you don't like it. How can we make this an okay experience for you?"

Want to know the solution, friends? Baby wearing. Yup, a sling. What fancy lingerie is to the honeymoon, a sling is to the babymoon! We know that newborns recognise their mother's scent and find great comfort there. This would be much more difficult for Baby if he's also smelling the competing aromas of a food court. Snuggling Baby up close to Mama helps to nurture those important physiological connections. There is a wealth of evidence from research showing us how beneficial baby-wearing is. Having baby nestled nice and near helps to regulate his heartbeat. It keeps him warm. It boosts milk production.

Even if you think it's not for you, give it a go. Practise at home! Baby will thank you.

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hey baby, did you know...?

- Scientists have proved that regularly rocking a baby can help greatly in promoting brain growth, help them gain weight faster, develop vision and hearing earlier and demonstrate distinct sleep cycles at a younger age.
- It's been shown that even 15 minutes of rocking, rubbing, rolling and stroking a premature baby four times a day will greatly help her to coordinate her movements and her ability to learn.
- Famous premature babies include Albert Einstein, Charles Darwin, Isaac Newton, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Napoleon Bonaparte, Mark Twain, Victor Hugo, Pablo Picasso, Auguste Renoir, Stevie Wonder, Johann Goethe and Sir Winston Churchill.