

FR: Fatherhood. Some early observations.

51 upvotes | 9 December, 2019 | by OsmiumZulu

My firstborn, a son, was born a little over a month ago. It turns out that newborns, despite their incredible cuteness, are needy and time consuming. Hence, I have not been as active here. Fear not my fellow RPC goers, I have been taking diligent notes along the way to share.

The following thoughts are in no particular order. Take them or leave them as you will.

Pregnancy is no excuse to buckle as captain

After I impregnated my wife (that shouldn't be a weird thing to say) I constantly received well intended but blatantly stupid advice from other men about how to navigate a pregnant women's hormonal mood swings, strange cravings, and more. Turns out, if you have established yourself as captain and have her deeply in your frame the best thing to do is *nothing different*. So that's what I did. Guess what? Our relationship continued to be easy and sex continued to be awesome the entire pregnancy. Sure, she had emotional episodes and some wild mood swings, but these are just bigger more obvious fitness / comfort tests. It makes sense. A pregnant woman is *incredibly* vulnerable and reliant on others for support. She wants to know you are going to remain solidly and reliably alpha. I tend to disagree with the "pregnancy is a time to show your beta side" advice that sometimes gets thrown around. The woman is the "beta" in the relationship and she doesn't need another beta to care for the child, she needs an alpha who is going to fight off threats, hunt mastodon, and blaze a path forward for the family. This doesn't mean you don't change diapers and burp junior, but you do so because your legacy is worth building up the right way from the ground up.

A funny story, my wife and I were having sex while she was about halfway through the pregnancy. I was pounding away and she turned and said something hormonal like, "I need some reassurance that you want me". While I was inside of her. Rock hard. I think I told her that I wanted her because she was being a naughty girl, spanked her, and kept going. Later she told me she realized she was being crazy to question my desire for her in the midst of having sex. This whole event stood out to me because she has never asked something like that and I knew it was her being hormonal. Had I engaged her and stopped to explain all the reasons I found her desirable it would have likely derailed the whole thing. Maintain frame, AM, keep going.

Sex during pregnancy can be great.

My wife and I had regular sex (4+ times a week or more) throughout the pregnancy. One of our best times having sex in our entire marriage was during her second trimester. In fact, we had sex on the day she went into labor. Interesting point of note, my wife initiated more than I did.

Women in great shape fair much better.

It's a small sample size, but we know many women who were pregnant and delivered within a month of my wife. My wife was in the best shape of the bunch and continued to lift up until about the middle of the third trimester. She had the most straightforward labor of the bunch. In order of fitness, the rest of them followed. The least fit women had the hardest time with labor and required more medical interventions. We are convinced that several of them could have avoided complications simply by being physically stronger and having more stamina.

Fathers who lead don't have bitchy wives.

As with most things in life, there are good, bad, and plain stupid ways of parenting. There are infinite number of strong opinions on what the right way to do something (birthing, diapering, burping, sleeping,

medicating, etc). Do your homework. Don't leave every decision up to your wife who has been hearing about the virtues of *free-range organic grass fed upside-down breastfeeding* of whatever the latest trend is from her girlfriends. Not everything matters, but some things do matter and by being involved, researching the issue, and making the decision you will not only improve your child's well being but your wife will see you leading your family and follow accordingly.

Many of the wives I know with the least respect for their husbands is because their husband saddles them with all the decision making for the kids. That's a ton of responsibility and first mates resent captains who leave all the hard calls up to them.

My wife has often expressed her appreciation for me taking the lead in deciding things involving our son. I delegate a lot to her, but she knows she can come to me for help making a decision if she is deciding between options. I have a cousin who's wife is a busybody who evidently makes all the decisions for their sons. The results are unpredictable and varying and it doesn't reflect well on him as their father. I don't want to be that guy and neither should you.

Babies have amazing frame.

You have no idea what a complete self-outlook is until you meet someone who has no ability to discern that other people outside themselves even exist. Despite your best efforts, their outlook cannot be changed and you inevitably end up bending your efforts (time, attention, money, etc) to suit their wants. Nothing to really elaborate on here yet, but it is fascinating to watch.

Never let your kid break your frame, especially not in front of your wife.

Doesn't this contradict the point above? Not exactly. My baby may not have the cognitive development yet to enter my frame, but that doesn't mean I need to fall into his. I admit, when my son is screaming his head off for reasons I have yet to diagnose, it can become frustrating. If I were to lose my cool because *a baby* was fussy, how could my wife trust that I won't lose my cool when a real problem arises?

Automate everything you can.

The newborn phase is not the time to skimp, pinch pennies, and save. Do whatever you need to do as quickly and easily as possible, or it will likely turn into a mess. You've been building your career and stockpiling funds for the war chest, right? Well now is the time to tap into that to make life easy for a little while. Spending extra on services and quality products that do the job easily is *well worth it* because simple tasks can require ten times more focus and effort to pull off with newborns. You want to automate or ease the repetitive undesirable things as much as possible so you can focus your time on more important things like sleeping, hitting the gym, reading, hustling, whatever.

Having a kid is not that expensive, if you're smart about it.

I've always heard that having children is extremely expensive, so I wanted to put it to the test. I asked my wife to start a spreadsheet. The used market for kid stuff is insane. Essentially new and perfectly functional items can be found at *a tenth* of the cost of buying new. If you ask around, a lot of other parents who aren't using their newborn stuff at the moment are happy to loan them to you. Some products, like cloth diapers, work far better than their disposable counter parts and save you a ton of money in the meantime.

Even the labor and delivery need not be all that expensive if you shop around and screen for insurance coverage ahead of time. So far we've spend about a third of what it would cost if we had done the easy thing and bought everything new. I'm sure costs will rise as our son becomes mobile and starts to injure himself or gets sick but from a pure material cost it is not that bad.

Going to the gym is more difficult now.

You're exhausted from getting terrible sleep. Your nutrition is probably not on point. The thought of

going to the gym to lift heavy things sounds terrible. This is why being disciplined is far more important than being motivated.

Leaving the house to go to the gym also means leaving my wife alone with a newborn. It's doable, but it isn't fun. When junior spits up all over your wife, poops, and pees through his diaper and swaddle in about 30 seconds (this happened the other day) having a second set of hands goes a long way. A situation that is inconvenient can quickly turn into a major annoyance when you are on your own. Taking care of yourself *and your crew* is important. This doesn't mean you don't go to the gym, but it means you cannot be indulging yourself wasting time screwing around between sets. You go in with a purpose, execute, and get out.

Until some sort of "normal" rhythm is established maintenance is your primary goal. If you've been going to the gym 4-6 times a week, it may be time to shift to doing 2 full body days. That is the approach I took for the first few weeks. Those workouts sucked, but they kept my strength up. This week I've begun shifting back to a more normal routine. Not only did I maintain my strength, but I PR'd on bench and squat and matched my all-time-best PR on Deadlift.

It's not as hard as people make it out to be.

Having a newborn isn't that hard. It's challenging compared to life before-hand, but people who have an otherwise healthy newborn and essentially fall apart likely did not prepare before hand and are not adapting well.

Fatherhood is amazing.

I cried when I saw my son for the first time. I was so happy to meet my heir, my legacy, my protege who I hope outdoes me in life, love, and godliness. I think the last time I cried before that was at my grandfather's funeral way back in high school. Snapping my clavicle in half or having appendicitis? No tears. Crying over pain is for pussies. Crying for joy is for those who are blessed to experience such joy.

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Comments

macedude • 6 points • 9 December, 2019 03:12 PM

Wow. I'm honestly pretty speechless after reading this. Thank you for writing this up, I will definitely be re-reading it in the future, and I pray that I have a similar experience someday.

rocknrollchuck • 4 points • 9 December, 2019 05:34 PM

This is an excellent guide for what to expect as a new father!

Stryker7200 • 2 points • 9 December, 2019 07:51 PM

As a first time father you are pretty much spot on. I will say things can get much harder as you keep adding kids tho ;)

htownbounce • 2 points • 9 December, 2019 10:06 PM

Love this post! I just became a new father like you, and a lot of this stuff is spot on. I've been making sure that if my wife is getting frustrated from the baby continuing to cry (happens often if my wife doesn't nap with the baby), I take the baby with a happy, positive demeanor. I can calm the baby down within 10 minutes (unless she's hungry and my wife is wanting to breastfeed).

Red-Curious • 2 points • 17 December, 2019 06:30 AM

Excellent post in its entirety!

Babies have amazing frame.

I'd contemplated doing a series on parenting and this was exactly one of my points. Kids, in general, virtually always operate from their own point of origin. Most parents believe their entire job is to train their kids to stop doing that. I'm taking a slightly different approach with my son. Results TBD, but it's working.

I admit, when my son is screaming his head off for reasons I have yet to diagnose, it can become frustrating.

That was one of my advantages as a younger father. I can deal with 4 kids screaming bloody murder at once and keep reading/eating/whatever. Too many parents are obsessed with attending to their kids' every need. This will ruin them down the road.

The newborn phase is not the time to skimp, pinch pennies, and save.

I'd say this more depends on your phase of life when you have kids. I wouldn't let your newborn change your financial goals. If you're younger, then you should absolutely pinch your pennies. You haven't had the time to save up a war chest yet. Financial wisdom for long-term planning doesn't change because you have a kid. If anything, it becomes harder. If you have a kid later in life to the point where you actually have discretionary income, then go for it. But I would not recommend that path for those who are having kids in their 20s.

Some products, like cloth diapers, work far better than their disposable counterparts and save you a ton of money in the meantime.

So ... this is the exact opposite of what you just said. Cloth diapers are also way more time-consuming than their disposable counterparts. Either way - your underlying point is absolutely true. There are some things that should not be compromised on, though, so watch out for that. For example - don't buy a used car seat that was in a car accident. Or don't buy used shoes for kids.

Going to the gym is more difficult now.

Welcome to my world ... finally!

Leaving the house to go to the gym also means leaving my wife alone with a newborn. It's doable, but it isn't fun.

It gets worse when you have multiple kids and your wife is adamant that she cannot handle the chaos. The trick is to find ways to bring your kids with you. My 8yo son now works out with me (and good luck finding a gym that will actually let 8yo kids use the equipment!). I also pay for the other kids to have access to their play area ... but even that is less than ideal because then you're shoving your kids in a daycare-type center for most of your quality evening hours every week, if you're doing that every time you go. Another alternative I've found is leaving work early and getting extra hours in at night after everyone else is in bed ... but I also have a job where I make my own hours and not everyone does.

Anyway, I've long been telling people that gym-time is much harder when you have kids (especially multiples who are young), but most people think I'm crazy. It's definitely doable, though. You just have to make sacrifices on some other priorities.

it means you cannot be indulging yourself wasting time screwing around between sets

That's the direction I've taken lately. I used to spend 2.5 hours there 5 days a week (even after my 4th was born). I've lately shifted to about 60 minutes of high-intensity lifting and do my cardio at home. As you note, my gains have stopped. I've probably even dropped a bit. I'm no longer benching close to 300 - I now hover around 265 for my sets (sometimes less if I'm low on calories). I really haven't pushed PRs in months. I only do that when I know I've got an easy couple weeks that I can really dedicate to it.

Another thing worth noting: dieting will become more difficult when your kids are old enough to eat real food and you want to start establishing a pattern of family meals as a time to process your kids' day with them. Before kids, my wife and I often ate separately and I had a lot more autonomy over things. Nowadays, it's awkward if everyone else is eating and I've got an empty plate, or if I've got something different from what everyone else has. I still do it from time to time, but it creates a sense of disunity that I prefer to avoid when I can.

It's not as hard as people make it out to be.

More common advice I often given. It's as hard as you psych yourself out to believe it will be. Having kids is easy. One of the things that my wife claims to be ticked off most about me is the fact that I can manage all 4 kids in public, out to eat, at a playground, walking through stores, etc. with a smile on my face and no problems at all, whereas for her the very thought of walking down the street with all 4 brings a wave of paralyzing stress over her.

Glad to hear this is all going so well for you, brother! Keep being an inspiration to the group.

OsmiumZulu[S] • 1 point • 17 December, 2019 07:24 AM

I'd contemplated doing a series on parenting

Please do, I'd certainly be interested in that.

I'd say this more depends on your phase of life when you have kids... If you're younger, then you should absolutely pinch your pennies. You haven't had the time to save up a war chest yet.

Fair point. I was running with the assumption that a man has his financial house in order before adding additional mouths to feed, but that is not always the case.

I wouldn't let your newborn change your financial goals.

Nor would I. That said, budgeting ahead of time to be able to splurge on conveniences for the first month is, in my mind, prudent. My wife and I live fairly frugally despite having a lot of disposable income, but intentionally allowed ourselves to spend on convenience for the first three weeks or so. Now that my son has started to follow a more regular sleep schedule, my wife has largely recovered from labor, and things have otherwise stabilized, we've returned to our previous spending baseline.

So ... this is the exact opposite of what you just said. Cloth diapers are also way more time-consuming than their disposable counter-parts.

Interestingly, we've found the opposite to be true. My son pisses straight through the disposables which meant having to change his diaper, clothes, swaddle, and crib sheet. Using cloth diapers with a cover has proven essentially bulletproof when it comes to leakage and has actually reduced the amount of laundry and cleanup time we were doing before. Done wrong I can definitely see how it can be a pain, but spending the little extra to get things that speed up the process (sprayer, stretch-snaps rather than pins, etc) makes the differences feel marginal. Both my wife and I prefer it to disposables at this point, not to mention the cost saving in the long run.

I've found is leaving work early and getting extra hours in at night after everyone else is in bed.

I actually just got back from the gym after my wife went to bed. I am a night owl and working out later on suits me better than waking up early. Not to mention the gym is largely empty.

I've long been telling people that gym-time is much harder when you have kids (especially multiples who are young), but most people think I'm crazy.

I 100% believe it and for this very reason I have been planning to invest setting up a modest home gym once we settle into a longer-term home. My wife works out as much as I do so the logistics of both of us trying to get out of the house to work out while having multiple children makes the convenience of having a home set up seem well worth it. Have you considered this option and if so, where did you land up?

I used to spend 2.5 hours there 5 days a week (even after my 4th was born). I've lately shifted to about 60 minutes of high-intensity lifting and do my cardio at home. As you note, my gains have stopped.

What programming are you running? That still sounds like enough time in the gym to induce hypertrophy and make progress in your lifts. Makes me think that the anabolic rather than catabolic side of things may be worth looking at. Are you eating enough / getting enough sleep?

Another thing worth noting: dieting will become more difficult when your kids are old enough to eat real food

This is a really good point and something I am going to have to consider and account for. I am blessed to have a registered dietitian for a wife so she is super helpful / supportive when it comes to the dieting side of things. Nonetheless, the family harmony thing is important. Good call, I'm going to have to think on this one.

Glad to hear this is all going so well for you, brother! Keep being an inspiration to the group.

Thanks RC. I'll try to post periodic updates as things progress.

Red-Curious • 1 point • 17 December, 2019 10:42 PM

splurge on conveniences for the first month

That's fair. The biggest convenience, in my view, is having a decent swing. With a good enough swing,

you can have your life back for several hours. I know you're not technically supposed to, but I used to let my kid sleep overnight in those things when they were particularly cranky. Worked every time.

| My son pisses straight through the disposables

Weird. I've only ever had that happen twice and it was because we went hours past a normal changing time without realizing. My experience with the cloth diapers, though, is that the pee always soaks through.

| working out later on suits me

Me too. And that was my pattern at my old gym. After moving, the new gym closes at 9:30. Kids go to bed at 8 (aren't actually done with night time routines until 8:30). Add in the 10 minutes it takes to get there and time to walk in, drop stuff off in the lockers, etc. plus buffer time ... I'd end up with like 35 minutes, which just isn't worth the effort. So, night time lifting is out as an option for me for now.

| invest setting up a modest home gym

I already have a bench. I just need a decent bar and weights (right now I only have dumbbells to go with it). My wife also bought a stationary bike for my birthday. I've had a treadmill before, but too many things can go wrong with them that they're just not worth it in the home.

| What programming are you running?

I do a modified greyskull. I focus on the 5 main lifts still, but I drop it down to 3 sets instead of 5, and reduce the weight, up the reps each set. So, my first set is about 90-95% of my max, then I usually drop a 5 or 10 off of each side, depending on the type of lift it is for each successive set with the expectation of doing an AMRAP for the last set. The only lift I do every time is the bench (the other 4 alternate), and I do leg raises on the bench after every set to hit my abs. After doing 3-4 of the main 5 lifts, I usually pick a couple peripheral things to work. Most often it's lats or biceps.

I believe the reason for my losses has less to do with my current routine and more to do with the 2 months off from moving, then another month off after taking over my law firm. I just haven't had the time to rebuild yet. I haven't lost much, but am certainly not able to repeat a 300lb bench again.

| Are you eating enough / getting enough sleep?

I probably still eat too much, so that's not an issue. If anything, my biggest aesthetic gains need to come from better dieting. As for sleep, that's always been a big, fat no for me. I average about 5.5-6 hours a night. I've been that way since high school. It's only recently (within the last 6 months) really started to affect me to the point I feel myself wanting more sleep, but my body won't let me even when I try. I'll have to work on that.

| I am blessed to have a registered dietitian for a wife

That's definitely helpful. I remember commenting to my wife when we were dating on how much food she eats - most of it junk. Her reply: "It's a blessing from my dad's side of the family. I can eat whatever I want and really never gain weight."

This has mostly held to be true. While she's not flat-abbled, she does often get comments from people about how she stays so "skinny" (skinny fat is probably a better term - thin, but no toning/definition). It probably has something to do with her height too - she's right around 5'10", which is tall for most girls. Either way, the effect is that she can still eat whatever she wants, which makes it less likely that healthy foods are getting put on the table if she's in charge of the cooking for a day. I do most of the cooking and

for family meal days (i.e. when we don't have company over) it's usually chicken/steak with broccoli and my son eats cereal or peanut butter.

On the kid thing again: the easy way I've resolved the food issue is simply to offer a default option if they don't like whatever I make for dinner. So, my son, who is incredibly picky, never has to eat what I make - but when he doesn't, he's stuck with PB&J. After 4-5 days of PB&J in a row, he starts to become more adventurous and willing to try new things ... then about vomits and goes back to PB&J. I know he doesn't like PB&J that much and he complains about it, but that's the point. He has to default to something unpreferable so he stays motivated to keep trying what we make.