

Cozy Does It  
Welcoming Your Winter Baby  
By Erin Mantz

When you greet your little one's sweet arrival this winter with overwhelming excitement and joy, don't let the chilly season's challenges take you by surprise. Winter days with a newborn aren't always as easy as warmer ones, but you can make them work. From gearing up and getting out to staying social and sane, the following tips can help new moms make the most of winter days while bonding with baby.

1. **Gear up.** If you haven't discovered this already, a vast selection of baby stuff is for sale – thousands of items to select from (and spend a small fortune on). According to moms who've survived bringing up winter babies, a few stand out as lifesavers. Consider securing these cold-weather comforts: a fleece car seat cover to avoid winter coat struggles; a thick, lush baby blanket to keep your little love warm and toasty; a bottle warmer for your car; onesie footie pajamas and cozy, *no-maternity* PJs for *you*. Mom Claudine Rubin of Gaithersburg recalls the Bundle Me fleece by JJ Cole being essential on cold weather days with January baby Sophie. Jana Abel of Potomac stayed on the move with her Kolcraft Snap & Go car seat carrier.

For moms due this winter, it's wise to use this time for research, shopping and stocking up. Joanne Myles is due with baby number two right before Christmas. This will be her first winter baby; she already has a 2-year-old son who was a fall baby. She is stocking up on some must-have baby stuff so this winter won't take her totally by surprise. For example, she already orders diapers online, and will continue to do so. She also plans to try one of the popular meal preparation stores, like Let's Dish, to stock her freezer with fresh, family-friendly dishes for those first few weeks.

2. **Get out.** Having the right winter gear ready makes getting out a little bit easier. Still, without your old schedule (in fact, with what's barely a schedule and not about you at all), round-the-clock feedings and little sleep, days and nights sometimes slip away. In winter, getting out takes a little extra effort, the right timing and planning – but do it.

Call a friend to meet for lunch and show off your new arrival. Or, have a family member, trusted friend or sitter watch baby for a few hours and go yourself. Have somewhere to go each week. Join an indoor Mommy & Me class or playgroup. Pop your little one into the stroller and tour a Smithsonian. Check out our monthly calendar of family events at [www.washingtonparent.com](http://www.washingtonparent.com) to find ideas on where to go and what to do around town. Close to home, head to the mall or just hang out at the local coffeehouse. The important thing is to make a concerted effort to actually *get out of the house*.

Take action to avoid feeling isolated. Nancy Markoe, a clinical social worker in the District, runs a support group for moms of babies and specializes in working with women and families. She's also a psychotherapist in private practice, working with women dealing with life transitions, including pregnancy and parenthood, so she sees firsthand how every woman reacts differently to having a baby. Some women feel ready and some don't. Some arrive feeling not only isolated and exhausted but also surprised about these feelings – and guilty of having them. “We don't always expect the depression, isolation and loneliness,” Markoe explains. “In addition, new moms may experience anxiety about their identity and changes in their careers and relationships with husbands, partners or in-laws. Add winter to that, and new moms are also dealing with concerns about germs, the logistics of getting baby ready to go outside in the cold, needing to stock supplies and sundown coming early.”

The bright side appears as Markoe offers tips to take new moms through this transition and time. “Feeling like yourself is very important – and we forget that,” she says. Getting out can remind you who you are. Markoe's advice:

- Find help and time for someone to fill in so you can get out – even if it's very cold outside.
- Take away the expectation that you should be out and about *all the time*. It's winter! Moms who have babies in the summer are often expected to be out. Realize that nobody expects you to be out ice-skating with a one-month-old in January!
- Exercise helps people feel like themselves again, so go back to the exercise you used to do, such as walking or swimming. Of course, consult your doctor first.

- Don't isolate yourself. Connect with others, and find a group. Just knowing there are other moms out there, sharing stories and having those stories normalized – and having the structure of somewhere to go – will help. Join a new mom support group, PACE group or Mommy/Baby class. (See the “Local Resources” sidebar for ideas and contact information.)
3. **Stay active.** We all hear endlessly about studies showing the physical and psychological benefits of exercise. For new moms, this rings even more true. Exercise can boost your immune system, mood, confidence, mental health, stamina and overall energy level. But, it's not just about losing the baby weight; it's about gaining the emotional benefits and stress relief. Even if you're tired (okay – not “if,” but “when”), bundle baby up and walk around the neighborhood. Join a health club that offers day care, pop in 15 minutes of a fitness video or invest in an elliptical if you can afford it. Consult your OB/GYN or primary care physician before beginning an exercise program post-pregnancy.
  4. **Stay social.** Get by with a little help from your friends. Your old life is just a phone call away, and your friends would love to hear how you're doing. You may also be surprised how e-mailing with a co-worker to schedule lunch or catch up on the latest office gossip makes you feel like your old self again. Invite another mom over for hot chocolate and adult conversation.

Gretchen Hendricks of McLean, mom to 3-year-old Zoe, took this tip to heart. She and husband Brad bundled up newborn Zoe in the February snowstorm of 2003 to take her home from the hospital in two feet of snow. But that nervous drive was just the beginning. They were headed not home, but to a hotel. Their real house was still under construction. Gretchen quickly learned to create her own comforts and connections. “To avoid going stir crazy, I kept in regular touch with family and friends. I invited some to lunch, or even asked them to bring carryout! Also, my computer enabled me to be on e-mail and stay on top of world events.”

Joining an online local moms community can help new moms find valuable feedback and new friends. New moms trade tips and commiserate in chat rooms and on message boards. While connecting online is easy to do – especially on long winter days and nights when you’re at home – don’t let it replace face time with other adults. In addition, realize the Internet offers both good information *and* misinformation. If you are reading about someone else’s problems or someone is commenting on yours, pay attention to your anxiety level. You are already feeling tired and anxious. If more information is raising new questions, adding to your confusion or stressing you out, take your concern to your pediatrician.

5. **Start planning early for spring!** Make future plans. Search online for fun events and openings that are months away – spring theater, summer concerts – and buy tickets for you and your hubby *now* (trust me, you *will* have searched for and found a babysitter by then)! Search for another neighborhood mom and plan to get active outside by visiting SeeMommyRun.com. While you’re home, research joining a nearby pool (which sometimes fill up months in advance) or summer class for you and baby.

Above all, take care of yourself and know yourself. If you can’t find the old you that you miss, take a step above to find her. You’ll discover a special benefit to having a winter baby: extra snuggling. One mom sums it up best: “Cherish every moment. Hold your baby as much as you can, and you will both stay warm.”

Erin Mantz is *Washington Parent*’s editor at large. She lives in Potomac with her husband, Jon, two sons, ages 1 and 5, and a pug named Rizzo.

### **Sidebar:**

#### **Cold Weather Comforts and Tips From Moms Who’ve Been There**

- “Get out...even if it’s just to the grocery store!”  
- Claudine Rubin, Gaithersburg
- “Join a weekly playgroup where you can meet other moms going through the same new experiences.”  
- Nicki Geifman, Rockville
- “Stock your cabinets with lots of food, treats and household supplies!”  
- Gretchen Hendricks, McLean
- “Check out DC Urban Moms ([www.dcurbanmom.com](http://www.dcurbanmom.com)). You’ll find a warm, supportive environment and a great way to meet people online and forge a connection.”  
- Jennifer Kogan, social worker and co-leader of a Washington, D.C., support group for moms of babies and toddlers
- “Take a shower first thing in the morning, after the first feeding.”  
- Jana Abel, Potomac

## **Sidebar:**

### **Local Resources to the Rescue**

- Support Groups for Moms of Infants and Toddlers
  - Nancy Markoe, MSW, LCSW-C and Deborah L. Horan, LCSW-C  
Meet other moms in a supportive environment and explore how having a baby impacts different facets of your life. New groups are forming in January. Send an e-mail to [info@Dccounseling.com](mailto:info@Dccounseling.com) or call 202-494-6840.
  - Jen Kogan, LICSW  
Join this support group run by Kogan and colleague Alison Fellowes, and find a forum that nurtures new moms, helps you grow as a parent and fosters relationships with other new moms.  
Contact Jen Kogan at 202-215-2790 or [Jenniferkogan@verizon.net](mailto:Jenniferkogan@verizon.net)
- Wednesday Morning Group – Bethesda  
Become a member and you’ll find an incredible network of women and intellectual stimulation well beyond the office setting. You can drop your little

one in a babysitting co-op room (age-specific) and hear fabulous speakers in a nearby room. Past speakers have included award-winning authors, famous news personalities, child development experts and more. For information about membership and fees, send an e-mail to [wmginfo@wmggroup.org](mailto:wmginfo@wmggroup.org).

- Contact local hospitals; many offer “new moms” groups in the neighborhood.
- Visit [www.washingtonparent.com](http://www.washingtonparent.com) to access the Parents’ Bulletin Board, which lists dozens of additional groups and resources.