Growing family
changing dynamics

Finances, housework and intimacy typically aren’t high on the list of talking points related to welcoming a new baby. And, although a new addition is an exciting time for families, the family dynamics change. Whether it’s your firstborn or your second, adding another child to the mix can affect families’ schedules, sleep patterns, finances and couples’ intimacy.

Laura Dean, MD, an OB-GYN with Stillwater Medical Group, says the best way to get ready for the changes is to plan.

“Couples should talk about every aspect of their lives, including work and household chores, and how they’ll adjust.”

FINANCES
Adding a baby to the family will likely increase family expenses. For first-time parents, Dr. Dean says determine what essentials you’ll need to purchase such as a crib, car seat, stroller and clothes.

“If both parents work outside the home, factor in daycare costs and budget for increased health insurance premiums and copays for doctor visits.”

SCHEDULES
For working parents, Dr. Dean advises couples to talk through the return-to-work transition. Will one parent need to leave earlier to get home for baby? Who will do daycare drop off and pick up? If you have children, how will a new sibling affect their schedules? For example, will the baby’s naptime interfere with your older child’s soccer practice? “Prioritize family time over too many scheduled activities,” says Dean.

“With our three children, my husband and I had a one sport and one music activity per kid rule, which worked for us.”

SIBLINGS
When introducing children to a new sibling, Dr. Dean says involve the older children in the process. “Let them pick out a new toy for the baby or have them come to a prenatal visit to hear baby’s heartbeat.” Moms and Dads can take older children to the park, to a movie or even to the grocery store just to have bonding time with the older child.

HOUSEHOLD CHORES
In the first few weeks after baby arrives, Dr. Dean urges parents to focus on connecting with the baby and bonding with your family. “Eat and sleep; don’t worry about the thank you notes or keeping the house clean.” She says try to limit your errands, particularly if you’ve had a cesarean section and can’t drive for two weeks. “Ask family and friends for help. In most cases, they want to help, they just need reassurance from the new parents that they’re not intruding.”

SLEEPING
Dr. Dean says before the new baby arrives, parents should agree on their routine for during-the-night awakenings and other responsibilities. Who will get up with the baby or will the parents take turns? “Whatever families decide, Dr. Dean says it’s important to make sleep a priority. ““Sometimes tag teaming is best because if everyone is sleep deprived, that’s hard.”

INTIMACY
Let’s be honest; intimacy is complicated by kids. There’s less time, less energy and less opportunity for spontaneity.

Cindy Land, RN, the pelvic health program coordinator at Stillwater Medical Group, recommends that couples be intentional and communicative with one another about connecting with each other.

“Schedule date nights. Hire a babysitter or swap babysitting with friends and plan time for just the two of you, when interruptions are unlikely or you’re not too tired.”