

PEDIATRIC CORNER

By Dr. Michael Anderson, MD, FAAP
NORTHSIDE CHILDREN'S PEDIATRIC CENTER

The pregnant male: Today's modern march of the penguins.

Who can forget the rather ironic film "Junior," where Danny DeVito and Arnold Schwarzenegger conspire to have a man become pregnant and birth a baby? This role reversal image often comes to the male mind when a mother-to-be publicly announces, "we're pregnant." Twice a dad now, I understand completely how the "we" in pregnancy could not be more true. Although not as physical as the film "junior" portrayed, most new fathers-to-be feel just as awkward as Arnold was in "Junior".

Surprisingly, many new "juniors" feel strangely "odd man out" during the whole pregnancy process. While this is both common and to some extent normal, steps to unite mother and father can be taken so when announcing, "*we're pregnant*," becomes more than a euphemism. All this phrase really conveys is that couples recognize their new parent status, and are going to begin parenting together before the baby is born.

A much better example for expecting couples might be the recent documentary film "March of the Penguins" as the proud father of two girls, I had to choke back tears during Morgan Freeman's depiction of how penguin parents live out the joint duties of parenting ... from birth to maturity. Children need their mothers and fathers, and a supportive dad will begin his role long before his baby is born. These dads will have a positive effect on the pregnancy, their marriage, and their future family.

Unlike Arnold in "Junior" you won't be carrying your newborn to term, but none-the-less you'll play a critically important and complicated role. Remember, as a new father, the greatest reward is to just sit back, relax, and embrace these new changes, both physically and emotionally, from the moment of your child's conception. Some new dads experience conflicting emotion ranging from joy to fear. This is to be expected, and when your baby is born, dad is naturally relieved, but many feel scared, awkward, or even left out. In watching their baby's birth, most have strong feelings of responsibility and love that can be overwhelming to say the least. As for my personal experience, it revealed a whole new level of love and admiration for my wife and new mother than ever before. While toxically romantic, the new feelings of financial responsibility were downright terrifying.

Pull Quote: So, how do dads overcome the confusion and conflict of pregnancy? Effective method one: Get as actively involved as possible...immediately. Attend doctor's visits, help out more at home, read pregnancy and parenting books, and attend a local childbirth education workshop if possible.

Good childbirth workshops are designed to bring couples closer together, and prepare for labor and delivery, especially as a team. These workshops are excellent ways for dads to show their support to mom, and, at the same time learn helpful disciplines that they otherwise might not have the opportunity to learn. One certified RN childbirth educator, who also happens to be my wife, recommends watching "March of the Penguins" to expecting parents as a realistic model for the true expression "we're pregnant."

Bringing your happy, healthy baby into the world is a true partnership. Dad's involvement is important right from the start. The more informed and involved you are throughout your male pregnancy, the better your experience will be for you, your partner... and your beautiful new baby.

Michael G. Anderson, MD, FAAP
Stephanie H. Anderson, DNP, RN, PNP-C, WNP-C
321 East Main Street • Canton, GA 30114
(across from the Bank of North Georgia)