

Wetting your baby's head and other rituals

Rituals are an inherent part of our human makeup and have been around for centuries. They bind us to our family, friends and community and reinforce a sense of belonging. By practicing birth traditions and rituals, the parents are not only celebrating their baby's life, but welcoming their baby into the community group. Historically, elders would tell stories of children's early lives and their birth rituals, to reinforce their sense of self and belonging to the group.

Today we are going to look specifically at rituals, traditions and get-togethers that Dads may partake in to celebrate their baby.

Wetting the baby's head (only male family members drinking in celebration of the birth) stems from an early Irish tradition. The top tier of the couple's wedding cake would have been soaked in Whiskey at the wedding and kept until the baby's christening, during this time the cake was sprinkled over the baby's head (& the rest was eaten by the adults!) - hence 'wetting the baby's head'!

While similar to a 'baby shower' wetting the baby's head is usually directed at fathers, although these may be more oriented towards drinking beer, watching sports, fishing, or playing video games! There is a bit of controversy over this celebration (usually from people believing that he hasn't gone through labour himself) but I believe Dad going out for a few beers to celebrate welcoming their baby into the world is ok. More often or not the Dad has shared the worries, helped with chores around the house, massaged sore feet and lower backs, participated in antenatal education and been there every step of the way. He deserves to celebrate his newborn too!

And, if it's good enough for the prince, it's good enough for a new father - the 'Prince' circulated through the Fountain Abbey pub, exclaiming "Everyone, the royal baby has just been born! Drinks are on me to wet the baby's head." Guests looked on with surprise as the 'Prince' served a tray of beer to them, saying to them "Have a beer on me". Nice one William!!!

This tradition has been around for generations - proud new fathers, passing out cigars to celebrate the arrival of their new baby. The tradition of handing out cigars comes from Native Americans who would exchange gifts to celebrate special occasions. Those gifts were very often early versions of what we now call a cigar. The tradition continued to evolve, and in the 17th and 18th centuries, when men were excluded from the birthing process, they would often smoke cigars together while they waited for the baby to be born. This practice may be less prevalent (and less accepted) than it was once upon a time, it remains a sincere and endearing gesture.

Another recent tradition I stumbled across while researching this topic is a 'Dadchelor Party', otherwise referred to as a 'Man Shower' or a 'Baby Stag', this is a party that is similar to a baby shower, but instead of being thrown for the mother-to-be, it is thrown for the father-to-be. It is a celebratory event held for a man shortly before he enters fatherhood to celebrate his "last days before fatherhood" or merely to spend time with his male friends.

The baby stag is usually planned by a friend or a group of friends of the future father and is modeled after that of a bachelor party. Typically the event is held before or early in the third trimester of pregnancy. It is considered to be one of the new emerging trends for fathers in the 21st century. Often, people assume these parties are to celebrate a man's life "before it is over" but this is far from the truth. Dadchelor Parties are a celebration and help create memories for the father-to-be that he will remember forever, including sharing of 'Dad Advice', sharing a beer (or two) and allows him to have a get-together with his friends in honour of this monumental life moment.



A 'Push Present for Dad' is also becoming a tradition this century. Usually, this has been something that Mum has been given after their baby is born (a way of acknowledging the labour and birth and their mindblowing accomplishment) there is no reason why we can't acknowledge the Dad too for being a supportive, loving partner, rubbing her back during labour and not biting her head off when she needed ginger ale at 3am (again!). A push present for the dad is a perfect opportunity to show them you have full confidence they can handle this and that you wouldn't want to be going through all of this baby journey with anybody but them, but I think it needs a name change and should be called a 'support present' - after all, he's not actually doing any of the pushing!!

Creating memories, talking about what the dad to be dreams of teaching, doing, showing his little one is equally important as the above traditions and rituals. Having a baby is an unbelievably big moment for both of you, you both need to celebrate this momentous and special time.

