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Yikes!  
I'll be a  
father in  
just over  
a week

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*plus David Coleman, Patricia Casey, Orla Barry and more*

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**real life**

No point  
in crying  
or wailing  
as labour  
day draws  
ever closer





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## David Young thought the build-up to his first child's birth would be spent musing philosophically on fatherhood . . . He was wrong

**I**N about a week, life's going to be oh so different. I'm on the cusp of becoming a brand new dad. For some reason, I'd thought these final days would be crammed full of philosophical wonderings and musings on what it all means. Instead, it's more like trying to pack for an expedition.

And that's a good thing – the sheer practicality of getting ready leaves precious little time for picking fluff out of belly buttons, pondering the significance of it all. Any notions of whiling away hours contemplating the import of the mantle of fatherhood have been well shelved. Most especially by the ladies in the firing line.

"Come over here," said the midwife, only moments into our last hospital visit. With a flinty look that could only suggest she'd unearthed a gem. "Hold there. Now, get a good grip." I obliged as best I could, but I wasn't tough enough for this veteran sentinel of all things natal. "Firm. Get a hold of it, man."

Lo and behold, I'd got junior's head between my fingers. My wife, still fully dressed yet incredibly calm, smiled in relief. We'd thought our baby was lying crossways – or transverse – and as such, in the altogether wrong position for a natural delivery. But here our midwife was rapidly wising us up.

"Your baby's head down and engaged. But facing front," she said. "And that means the first few hours of labour will be . . . pretty tough, while the child turns. After that, you'll be just fine." With those words, the midwife narrowly escaped being bear-hugged.

We'd been thinking junior was anything but sunny-side up. We'd been searching for all the natural ways to coax the baby to rotate. Rubbing and massaging. Humming. Propping future-mom up like a sphinx, in bed. Trying every trick in the gravity-defying book to get a fresh orientation.

Junior, though hadn't seemed interested in anything other than trying to disappear under mom-to-be's ribs. Even though we were guessing as we went, we were full sure things were 'breech', or

any other position you could imagine, other than inverted, and primed as nature intended.

"Give the rubbing a rest though," said the midwife, smiling at our innocence, and DIY doctoring. "Just give junior a chance to relax. No need to keep stimulating the child. Now come with me."

And away she whisked us down a corridor and behind another curtain.

With a few squirts of gel, there was an image flashing on screen – bopping and jiggling, and very much upside down. And for a moment, I thought I saw a wry grin in the inky black and white shapes. As if junior was curiously entertained by all this fuss.

"Do we know the blood types?" asked the midwife. As my wife nodded 'yes', all I could do was shrug apologetically. Juggling aloud whether she ought to let me – a 38-year-old – out of the hospital to organise my own test, she rolled her eyes and grinned: "We'll do it today."

"Chances are, honey," said the midwife, to my wife, "baby's blood will match daddy's. You're O negative. And he's, hmmm . . . probably not. No justice, eh. Which means you'll be given an anti-D injection when the time comes. Just so there's no complications with mixing of the bloods." Again, she was right. I was common as could be. O positive. I was impressed. This lady had the canniest knack of ticking stuff off the virtual to-do list, like no one else.

Even though we've dressed the cot, clicked the stroller into shape, and (almost) installed the car seat, amongst hundreds of other bunker-kit-out manoeuvres ahead of the big day, this one single and final visit has settled us more than anything.

Now all we've got to do is relax. It's hard sometimes, especially when advice gets lobbed at you from the unlikelyst of quarters. Just the other day, the man in the mobile phone store started: "All first babies are late arrivals, you know."

Future-mom zoned out.

But I couldn't help wishing a certain midwife would walk through the door, and put him back in his box. Now, where was I?

Oh, yeah. Breathing, slowly.



**ALL SET FOR THE BIG DAY:** David Young is getting into the spirit of impending fatherhood. Right, with wife Fiona.  
PICTURES: MARC O'SULLIVAN