

In about a month, I'm going to hold a child in my arms, like never before. It'll be my child. My very own. Even though I'm well into my 30s, I'm still grappling with the idea of becoming a 'dad'.

My wife, Fiona, is in her third trimester, and junior's arrival is pencilled in for 'anytime from now', so I know I've got to pull it together, fast.

But it's hard not to wonder if you're good enough — to be a father.

It still feels like yesterday when Fiona was peeing on a stick. As the two little bars appeared, we guffawed and hugged, before falling silent.

We'd just joined a journey that had already begun.

Still in disbelief, we called the doctor to make an appointment. You know, just to be absolutely sure. And before we knew it, we were being congratulated for the very first time.

"Well done," chimed our GP, even though she'd defused our worries about being late bloomers on previous visits.

Then 37, I had thought boats and ships had been busy departing port while I fiddled with my navel.

All this had been turned on its head. "Thanks doc. Whoah. Here we go," I boomed, surprising myself.

There were the three of us in this glorious muddle. Together. And she was our new best buddy.

She'd been there when we'd asked all those paranoid 'what if' questions; smiled and reassured us that things would work out just fine.

When nothing was stirring, she'd counselled how we'd give nature a nudge towards pregnancy. She'd told us of the myriad avenues we could venture down if the direct route didn't work out.

But there we were — well, two of us anyway — blown away by the news of things 'just happening'.

At this stage, the time we spent mulling over who'd be first to know seems a little goofy.

It ended up being parents first, sworn to secrecy (don't ask). Then siblings, and so on.

"We never thought it'd happen for ye. Put it there. Ha!" The very words you ought to keep to yourself. Each time I heard them, I cringed, and hummed.

It's the oddest thing, you see. You tell people there's a baby on the way, and immediately there's this grand salute to your sex life. It's a bit like getting a round of applause for your baby-making apparatus.

As sure as teddy bears picnic in the woods, freshly informed, well-intentioned, normally sane people invariably bellow, "Good man!", while thwacking you on the back.

Even if the two of you are stood in the middle of a supermarket.

It makes so little sense. Where all things to do with sex usually come with a dose of taboo, pregnancy announcements take no such tack.



New beginnings: David Young braces himself for the arrival of his first child

Baby products: Mothercare, Jarvis Centre, Dublin 1. Photograph: Marc O'Sullivan

diary entries. It's the full monty.

I've lost count of the number of doe-eyed naked ladies smiling back at me in each chapter.

Don't get me wrong, it's all very generous to share their changing body shapes. But they don't exactly elicit the fondest of regards from lady readers.

"This week you will look and feel great," reads a typical pep-talk line, from week 20-something. To which my wife duly responded by flinging the book across the room.

"Agh, that's how effin' super I'm doing today!"

Just the other day, I went window shopping for junior. "Have you got your four systems in place? Your systems, man?" tutted the shop assistant.

"You simply must have them sorted. There's your feeding, your washing, sleeping and travelling systems." And on he went, blinding me with baby science.

Having only ventured into the shop to browse buggies, prams and strollers, I found myself staring into an avalanche of gear requirements, combinations and permutations I hadn't a notion about.

Right about then, I think my whole head unplugged, leaving me with little more than, "Aha... yeah... hmm..." and the odd, "Yup".

We never even got close to monitors and the likes. Perhaps he'd sensed I was overwhelmed. In my mind's eye, I couldn't imagine junior being left alone for a single moment, any day soon.

As I drove home, I mulled this over, again and again. Twenty-four hours a day. Me — ever awake.

Would it eventually tip into insomnia? Should I start practising, like a junior doctor, and boycott regular sleep patterns?

Or should I try and jam pack in as much shut-eye between now and the big day as possible?

A quick look in the rear-view mirror brought me back to earth: the startled look would have to go. It was freaking me out.

Have I got what it takes to be a dad? Am I worthy of a kid looking up to me?

Questions like these are only the tip of the iceberg; well, that's if you're totally honest with yourself.

You think of your own father, and a little voice tells you those shoes can't be filled.

Regardless of any of the battles you've ever had with your old man, his paternal authority will always be bulletproof. And you'll always be the pretender.

How I'll ever reconcile my amateurism, well, I've no answers just yet — only the words of my midwife to fall back on.

"In a very short time, you'll know more about your baby than anyone else, so trust in yourself," she echoes.

Roll on chaos — brave words for someone who won't be doing any pushing — I'm as ready as I'm going to be, I suppose.

I'll let you know how it goes. **W**

First-time father

With just weeks to go until his wife gives birth, **David Young** wonders if he is ready for the chaos

And this is quickly followed by tummy touching and enquiries of due dates.

I'm well used to it now, I think.

As for my medical knowledge — most of it would probably fit on a standard postcard. Let me take you to class.

"So, what happens to the perineum when the baby's head's crowning?" asks the midwife, wide-eyed and hopeful.

The whole class winces, pauses and gingerly offers up a hushed "eh ... stretches?" Someone blurts "rips", before realising the hell that word can raise at a time like this.

The entire room flinches and grimaces.

"Wait, wait. It just gets thinner," cries the midwife, waving her hands, as if trying to put out a fire. "It's only when the baby's struggling... to push through. Then the doctor would make a little incision."

But it's too late — she's lost every last one of us. You see, there's just no gentle way really to introduce the idea of an episiotomy.

"And how do we know baby's feeding?" asks the midwife. I look around the room to see everyone else doing the same — scanning the walls and ceiling for answers.

Replies gently tumble out: "Baby's happy?" "Baby's sleeping?"

"Look in the nappy," smiles the midwife. "And the colour... in there?" she quizzes.

Again, tumbleweed turns and rolls down main street in my brain.

"Yellow," she says, drawing gasps of surprise and "aha", as if we're all making indelible mental notes.

And it dawns on me — if there were antenatal exams, I'd be held back a year.

All the more baffling though is the proliferation of baby books. The 'How To' bibles.

And it's not just the day-by-day