

# ‘I just can’t imagine not having that time to recover, rest and develop routines in the house’

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Nick took six weeks’ leave after his twins were born prematurely, and his wife recovered from a Caesarean



*Nick Butler-Watts, age 32, from Hertfordshire, became a father in April. After he found out his wife was having twins, he had requested two weeks of fully paid paternity leave, two weeks of annual leave, and two weeks of shared parental leave all to be taken as soon as his babies were born. His shared parental leave is paid at full pay, and he and plans to take three months off to take care of his children once his wife goes back to work after her maternity leave. His employer and colleagues encouraged him to use the leave. He is so thankful he had a full six weeks off at the start as his wife ended up in hospital with pre-eclampsia and then his twins had to be in hospital for a week after birth. The extra leave enabled him to develop a routine after the long, hard stay in hospital.*

Several colleagues had talked about my employer's generous shared parental leave, so when my wife found out she was pregnant, I knew I would want to take advantage of fully paid time off with my kids.

From a financial perspective, it was a no brainer – she would be able to go back to work and I could stay home with the kids while continuing to be paid.

But my decisions about taking leave during the first year didn't only come down to finances. I want to be a very hands-on dad and share the responsibilities with my wife as much as possible.

I spoke with HR and got all the paperwork sorted quite quickly. I would take two weeks of fully paid paternity leave, followed by two weeks of annual leave, followed by two weeks of shared parental leave – all to start. Several dads I work with told me they had wished they'd taken more weeks off during those early days, so I was sure it was something I wanted. Then when my wife goes back to work around the nine-month marker, I plan to have three months of fully paid shared parental leave to take care of our twin boys.

A few days before the babies were born, my wife was rushed into hospital with pre-eclampsia. After a few stressful days, it became clear that the babies would need to be delivered by emergency caesarean section. They were six weeks early so went into the neonatal intensive care. They were really small, had jaundice, needed feeding tubes, and one had a breathing problem. They ended up being in hospital for a week after the birth. If I hadn't had four extra weeks, most of my leave would have been in hospital. We would have gotten home and I would have been straight back into work very soon after.

Those early weeks were so tough – one of the hardest things we've ever had to do. I just can't imagine not having that time at home after to recover, rest, and develop routines in the house.

But luckily, I did have those four extra weeks at home with my family. Since my wife had been through a major operation which takes several weeks to recover from, I was able to support her at a very vulnerable time.

Those days consisted of so much bonding with our boys. I just got to spend all day feeding them, cuddling them, and changing their nappies. During the first week in hospital, all responsibility of care was sort of taken away from us, but I got to make up for lost time when we arrived back home and fully felt like a dad.

If I had only had two weeks of paternity leave, my memories of the time off with them would have been characterised by quite a lot of sadness of sitting in hospital. But tagging on those extra weeks meant I could return to work with happy memories of being at home with my new family.

I'm really looking forward to the three months off with my boys. I can't wait to take care of them, to get to know them even better, and share even more of the responsibility of parenting.

I know I'm one of the 'lucky' dads, but it shouldn't be that way. My story should be the norm, not the exception.