



So your wife's on bed rest...

Sure, she's in the prone position for months while you scrub the dishes. And the upside is what? **By Naveed Saleh, M.D.**

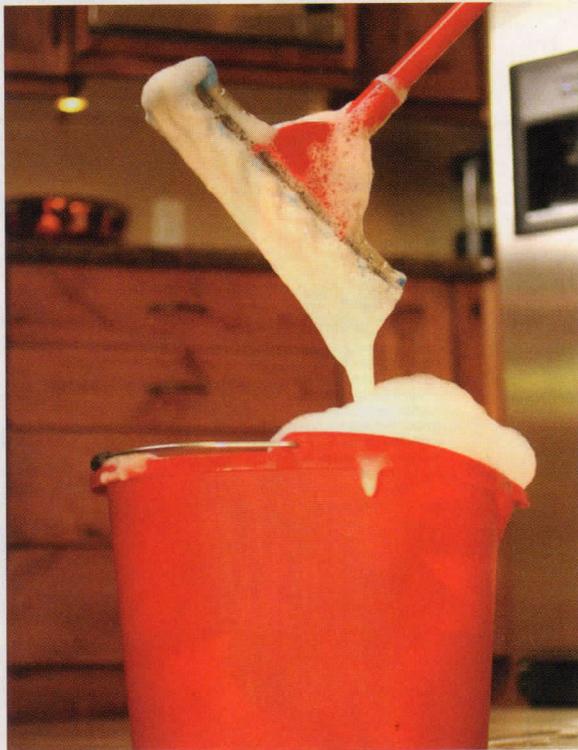
Many of my lifestyle decisions are unhealthy. For example, I believe that New England clam chowder is a beverage. That's why I always imagined my wife would be the first one on permanent bedpan duty. Like many men who are faced with the prospect of their partner being put on bed rest, I had no idea what I was up against. Honestly, it sounded quite relaxing. Medical school was a while ago, so I'd forgotten why expectant mothers were told to go lie down for months at a time and had no idea how strict and serious it can be.

My wife and I are both doctors. She's a family-medicine physician, and I'm a physician-journalist. This means she's used to 80-hour workweeks, and I'm used to being awake 80 hours a

week. The prospect of her being put on bed rest scared both of us. It meant she wouldn't be working, and I would be working, well, much harder than usual. Quite frankly, I didn't anticipate all the extra housework.

"Honey, I have to go again."

Because my wife was confined to strict bed rest the month before her scheduled Caesarean section, household duties fell to me. I'm not exactly a domestic type—because of my inexplicable proclivity for accidental fire, my kitchen mishaps are a subject of family lore. I did my best to do the dishes and laundry, cook, and take out the trash, all while hydrating my wife



and helping her to the bathroom. Wonderful.

I chatted with Jeff and Joanne Kimes, the husband-wife team responsible for *Pregnancy Sucks for Men*. Jeff says bed rest is difficult for men, because the man “basically becomes the chief cook and bottle-washer. He makes sure all the bills are paid, floors are clean, and meals are cooked.” Jeff and Joanne’s book is filled with good ideas about how to keep the expectant mom occupied while she’s waylaid in bed. Both authors suggest enlisting the aid of modern technology. “Take advantage of Skype and iChat,” Joanne advises. “When you can visually see family and friends on the screen, it really is like being with them.”

It’s more like bed “arrest”

Our maternal-fetal specialist Whitney J. Gonsoulin, M.D., says the most common reasons for bed rest are vaginal bleeding, preterm labor, and poor fetal growth or decreased amniotic fluid—this last one was our issue. Gonsoulin was careful to mention that there is limited proof that bed rest works, but perceived benefits include “lessening of stress on the mother and maybe improving circulation.”

He actually writes a prescription for bed rest, and his instructions are strict: A woman

“The man makes sure the bills are paid, floors are clean, and meals are cooked.”

on bed rest should only go to the bathroom, maybe sit at the table to eat her meals, and go to the doctor as needed. In more serious cases, she can’t leave her bed at all.

I learned the hard way that bed rest is stressful for everybody involved, including the one lying down. Charles W. Sanders, M.D., an ob-gyn and head of the department of humanities in medicine at Texas A&M College of Medicine, says bed rest can “drive [the woman] stark-raving mad.” He adds, “It doesn’t allow you to do things that you want to do. The woman needs a lot from the husband—much more than usual.” Sanders recommends that husbands “be ready to be more compassionate and more understanding, because these are trying times.”

The truth is, we were so grateful when our son was born healthy. I remember our bed rest experience about as fondly as I do a recurrent pilonidal cyst that I had to have surgically removed. It was a monster and silver bullets were in short supply, but we made it through and we’re stronger for it. ●

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Bed rest do’s and don’ts

drawn from *Pregnancy Sucks for Men*, by Jeff and Joanne Kimes

DO...

- Stock the bedside: water, snacks, books, magazines, toiletries, and DVDs
- Get a pair of walkie-talkies
- Have a laptop with Internet access
- Buy a foam crate mattress to relieve mom-to-be’s aches and pains
- Encourage goal-directed activities such as organizing a photo album or scrapbook

DON’T...

- Ignore
- Complain or be insensitive
- Leave her unattended for long periods of time
- Dismiss her complaints as mere exaggeration