

# MEDIA RELEASE



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## New dads hear from their babies – and they love it

“three mustard poos in a row – I’m loving being a dad”

- a reply text to SMS4dads from a new dad

A new mobile phone based service sends texts from their unborn babies to expectant fathers. The SMS4dads project delivers hints and tips about baby development, getting along with your partners and staying healthy. The messages use the voice of the baby to build the connection with dad.

- *Hey dad. I am going to triple my weight in the first year of life. Don't let this happen to you too*
- *Noticing how I communicate can start before birth. Do I respond differently to different music? What does mum think?*
- *Talk to me about anything dad. Your words will help my brain development*

The messages also help dads support the mum.

- *Find ways to tell your partner she is doing an amazing job. This could be really important to her.*
- *Put time into your relationship. This will help to maintain intimacy. Remember that you are both experiencing a major life change.*
- *Right now in pregnancy, discomfort is normal. Try offering your partner a massage or asking her what else you could do to help.*

CRRMH Director, Professor David Perkins, said the SMS4dads service is an appealing resource for fathers in rural communities due to its simplicity, ease of use and low cost.

“We know that dads can be affected by post-natal depression and in rural areas they may feel especially isolated and lacking support. SMS4dads connects fathers with tips, information and links and supports them during what can often be a very challenging time,” said Professor Perkins.

According to Dr Richard Fletcher, Chief Investigator on the project – the new service is helping formulate ground-breaking research into fathers and fathering.

“We have shown in the feasibility study that this way of talking to dads works. We enrolled over 500 dads in SMS4dads. After six months 87% of the dads stayed with the program and 92% say it helped them in becoming a new dad,” said Dr Fletcher.

“We have dads from all states enrolled and from early in the pregnancy. The dads complete a simple screening test when they enrol and that tells us that about 30% of these dads are doing it tough.

“It’s important to get support to these dads because we now know that if the dad is depressed or anxious during this time then it has an effect on the infant. In an earlier study we analysed data from more than 5,000 families and showed that the children of dads with depressive symptoms have 3 times

the rate of behaviour problems. (Fletcher et al 2011 Medical Journal of Australia)

“Dads today don’t want to be on the sideline, they want to be involved as much as they can be. But dads are flat out in the lead up to the birth and then they rush back to work after two weeks leave.

“The dads use the texts to figure out what is happening to the baby and to better support their partner. SMS4dads texts arrive on their phone without cost, they can read it whenever and they don’t have to do anything,” said Dr Fletcher.

Here are some of their comments about the way that the texts helped their relationship

- *It is easy to forget to pay attention/complement your partner with a new child - the text messages were often a great reminder to do that.*
- *The reinforcement of what I was trying to do such as being supportive of breastfeeding helped us both out*
- *Receiving messages helped me to stop and reflect on what her struggles might be, and this helped me to be more empathetic and understanding.*
- *One message in particular was, it told me to tell my partner that they're doing a good job. I did as requested and had a good chat with my wife about motherhood and how she is going.*

## **MORE ON SMS4dads**

Watch the 75 second introduction to SMS4dads on Youtube

<https://youtu.be/HaWMZDHDmsM>

Download the 75 second introduction to SMS4dads

<https://db.tt/JNmihxU9>

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[www.sms4dads.com](http://www.sms4dads.com)

SMS4dads See <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/fatherhoodbulletin>

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