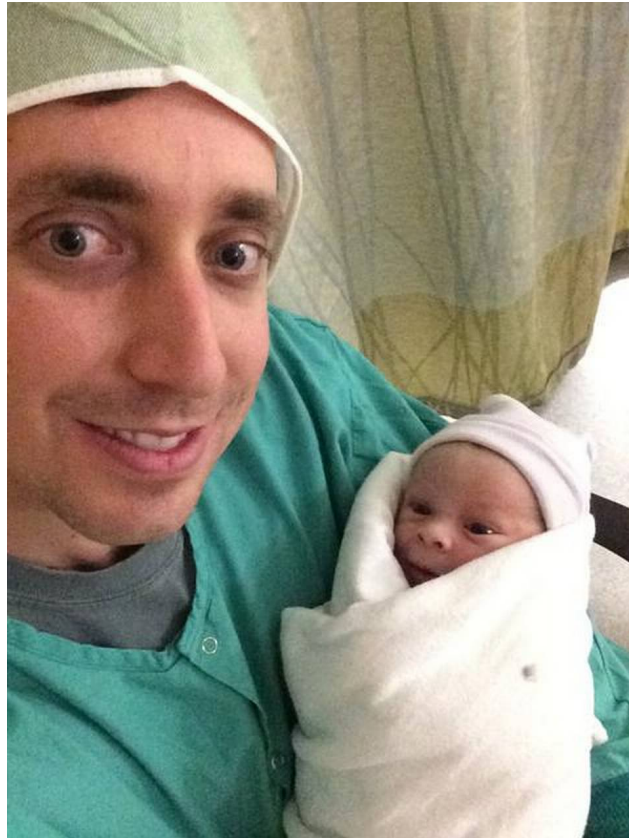


New dad: What I learned

13 experiences from when my wife gave birth

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Proud dad Ted Williams and son Watt. TED WILLIAMS

Our son, Watt, was born at 6:45 a.m. on Oct. 31, 7 pounds 8 ounces. I felt prepared for his birth – we went to childbirth classes, breast-feeding class and infant CPR class – but, as a first time dad, I experienced several surprising things.

I want to share them so that future Charlotte dads have a more complete view of childbirth.

1. I wanted to kiss the epidural lady on the lips. Labor doesn't look fun. If your wife is nuts, she won't get an epidural, but if she's not nuts, she'll get one. It's night and day before and after that thing kicks in. Our anesthesiologist was a super nice 50-year-old. I loved her.

2. The maternity suites are baller. The birthing suite was huge. Felt like a nice Hampton Inn, except with better mood lighting. I've heard that childbirth is lucrative for hospital systems, so I think there is an arms race between Novant and CMC. Whatever is happening, the room was incredible. You could have held a roller skating party in there.

3. That peanut ball was nuts. I felt like I was watching some extreme yoga class or something. The nurse and I helped my wife get into all sorts of crazy yoga-type positions with the peanut ball.

4. Be present. The Thursday night my wife went into labor, the Panthers were playing the Saints. We were chilling in the birthing room and I turn on the TV to watch the game. Wife told me to. I watched about eight plays. Just couldn't do it. Turned off the TV. Turned off my cellphone. My brother, Drew, told me to do this, and he was so right. It's an incredible mix of emotions – anxiety and joy – and it's one of those rare human experiences that brings two people together. Unplug. You have the rest of your life to check Instagram – be with your wife.

5. You're alone before a C-section birth. Our doctor said natural birth wasn't going to work out at about 5 a.m. and scheduled my wife's C-section for around 6:15. I didn't get to go with my wife into the operating room as they prepped her for surgery (they don't allow it), so I sat there in scrubs for about 20 minutes. Felt like 20 hours. I stared at some incredibly boring painting on the wall and was so bored that I thought I was going to go insane. What did I do? Turned on my phone, took a selfie and texted it to my dad. Seemed to make sense at the time.

6. You're alone (with baby) after a C-section birth. I walked into the surgery room and there were about 10 people. After about seven minutes, Watt was born. They suctioned the heck out of the little guy, burrito-wrapped him, handed him to me and I went and waited in a holding pen. Just me. No doctors. No nurses. No wife. Just me and Watt. I almost started crying as he looked at me, but then I decided that may throw the nurses off, so I held it in. We took another selfie. Seemed to make sense at the time. Side note: I don't do selfies and I can't explain this. We were alone for 11 minutes.

7. They don't take your baby away. I love Watt, but I think I would have paid at least \$1,000 for three hours of uninterrupted sleep that second night. Seriously, they don't take your baby away to the nursery like they used to. I think it's a new "rooming in" theory or something. They say it is good bonding time but I am pretty sure that it's solely a cost-cutting move. Either way, you don't sleep. Don't expect it to be like the movies where you stare through a window into the newborn nursery.

8. Circumcision dude gives you method options. The pediatric urologist gave me the option of circumcision method I'd like performed on my son. I asked him which of the two is more popular. He said, "Both are popular." I asked him which method he prefers, he said "either." My blood pressure rose and I almost said: "Dude, you've snipped thousands of penises. I haven't – you tell me what you're more comfortable with. Lead me."

9. You realize how lucky you are. More than 600 babies were born at CMC-Main in October. That's a lot of babies. This means they have specialists that handle high-risk pregnancies and births. It also means you'll meet all types of parents. If you have a healthy baby and love your wife, you're so freaking lucky. Don't take that for granted, and if you're tired – shut up and deal.

10. Food is much better than you think. The food they brought my wife was outstanding. And, she pounded apple juice like a college freshman pounds Natural Light. I found the CMC cafeteria to be fantastic, and I ate at least four salads with chicken salad.

11. Compared with the maternity suites, the new-mother rooms are tight. I've never thought more about spatial planning than in that room. My wife also made me pack my own sheets and blanket, which I thought was crazy – until I loved them. I love my in-laws, but if you don't, I highly recommend making a coffee run when the extended family enters so that you don't get claustrophobic.

12. Your baby mama is remarkable. My wife is a hot babe and I love her, but oh my goodness – I now have a whole new perspective on her courage. It's weird trying to explain the joy it will give you to see her with your child. When Watt was about 20 minutes old, they put him skin-to-skin on my wife and to see her eyes well up with tears as Watt snuggled on her was an insane experience.

13. You'll get obsessed. Your obsession will weird non-dads out, but you won't care.

Ted Williams is the Observer's director of digital strategy/new initiatives. He runs charlottefive.com (<http://www.charlottefive.com/>), where this piece first appeared, and where you can find Charlotte's Top 5 news and entertainment stories each day at 7 a.m. Check it out.