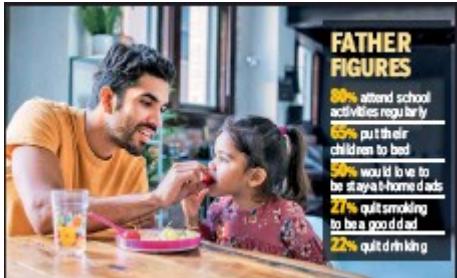


Rise of the penguin dads

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Sulabh Goel, an eye surgeon, starts his day getting his three-year-old daughter, Siya, ready for school. He wakes her up, brushes her teeth, gets her into school uniform and feeds her breakfast. "Today she had nasal congestion so I also gave her steam and medicines," says Goel, 37, who also picks her up from school and takes her to dance class in the evening. His wife, also a surgeon, has her hands full looking after their six-month-old son Soham so Goel is happy to lend a hand. "My wife says that I braid Siya's hair better than her," smiles Goel, who runs an eye hospital in Haridwar.

Goel belongs to the growing tribe of penguin dads who, quite like the male emperor penguin, put in as much work in raising kids as the mom. This is borne out by a recent survey of 1,700 fathers in 17 cities by Flipkart, the e-retail platform. Fathers in Bengaluru were found to be most active, doing 91% of activities with their children, while Hyderabad dads contributed the least, with only 20%. About 80% dads attend school activities regularly and half of them wouldn't mind being stay-at-home dads.

"We were pleasantly surprised with the general trend line across the country...dads who make time to do a lot more against all odds," says Shoumyan Biswas, VP, Flipkart.

In Delhi-NCR, Vartesh Singh Parmar says he always leaves his office on time to take his three-year-old daughter Prisha to the park. "My friends often ask me why my wife can't do it. I tell them it's not about my wife but about me and my daughter. I want to spend as much time with her as possible," says the 38-year-old IT professional. Parmar has learnt to make his daughter's hair, clip her nails, even apply nail paint. The most difficult part, he admits, is getting her to drink milk in the morning. "I have to sit with her, turn on Doraemon, talk to her... I was never so patient but she has taught me."

In fact, the Flipkart survey found 58% of the fathers had become more patient. Around 27% quit cigarettes and 22% gave up drinking. Bengaluru resident Aranya Sundaram says her husband, a smoker for more than 15 years, quit when the couple was expecting their first child. "Over the years I tried everything from expensive gifts to emotional blackmail. But it was the prospect of raising a child that made him kick the butt," says Sundaram, mother to a two-year-old son.

It pays to be a penguin dad. Child psychologist and author Dr Shelja Sen says: "There is enough research showing that children whose fathers share in their care demonstrate more cognitive competence, increased empathy, fewer gender biases and greater self-control."