

# How Can Dads Help with Breastfeeding?

You are undoubtedly feeling a great deal of pride, joy and delight at the birth of your baby. There can also be some resentment, fear, insecurity and feelings of being overwhelmed. Don't worry, these feelings are perfectly normal. A new baby is a lot of responsibility, now and for the next couple of decades! Soon you will be feeling like a pro and very comfortable with your new role. Although you cannot breastfeed your baby, you play a key role in the success of breastfeeding your baby.

## You Are Important in So Many Ways!

- ♥ **Provide plenty of encouragement** and reassurance to the new mother, she will tend to feel more confident in her feeding choice. Sometimes the first few weeks of breastfeeding can be challenging. Continue to coach her after delivery. With your help and support she will conquer any problems she may encounter.
- ♥ **Do your reading and learn about the benefits of breastfeeding** for both your baby and your partner. It takes two people to remember all the information that you are trying to learn in these early days. You can support the new mother most effectively if you are really convinced that breastfeeding is best for your baby. But, even if you are not completely convinced, you should appreciate the fact that she really wants to breastfeed. Show your loving support by helping her in whatever ways you can.
- ♥ **Don't underestimate your importance.** Sometimes dads feel left out in the early weeks. The attention is heaped on your new baby and your partner. You may feel that your role is unimportant. It will be difficult for your partner to succeed at breastfeeding for very long without your ongoing help and support.

## Things That You Can Do With Your Baby

While it may be hard to believe right now, remember - babies don't break. Although your baby seems so small and fragile, you can't hurt her by picking her up, gentle holding, talking, walking, changing diapers, etc. Get involved in whatever way you can!

- ♥ **Change your baby's diaper.** It's easy after the first few, and when a baby is breastfed, it doesn't really smell very bad!
- ♥ **Give your baby a bath.** This is really one of the most fun things you can do with the baby right now.
- ♥ **Bring your baby to your partner for feedings.** Yes, even in the middle of the night!
- ♥ **Spend time with your baby** on your bare chest touching, stroking, holding, talking softly or just doze off together. Babies thrive on skin-to-skin contact.
- ♥ **Cuddle and walk** with a fussy baby – movement is calming for many babies.



- ♥ **Talk and sing to your baby.** Babies learn to speak from hearing lots of talking.
- ♥ **Hold your baby** while your partner takes a shower, naps or eats a warm meal.
- ♥ **Give your baby a massage.** Stroking and gentle massage can be soothing for both dad and baby.
- ♥ **Play with your baby.** Dads typically have different ways of playing with babies than mothers do. This is valuable for babies and fun for you too.

While you may want to be involved by doing some of the feedings, it is best to put off bottle feedings until your baby is 4-6 weeks old. Sometimes, giving a bottle too early confuses the baby and she does not want to go back to the breast. If you and your partner decide that doing some bottle feedings would be helpful for you both, using breast milk in the bottle is best.

## Things You Can Do to Help Mom Succeed

- ♥ **Make sure your partner is comfortable** while breastfeeding. Be sure she has any needed accessories close at hand such as pillows, a foot stool or something to drink.
- ♥ **Check the baby's positioning and latch-on during breastfeeding.** Mom may not be able to see how the baby is positioned or latched on from her angle. Offer to adjust her pillows or make the position more comfortable.
- ♥ **Make sure your partner gets the sleep she needs** throughout the night and encourage her to nap every day. She needs a great deal of rest after childbirth to recover her strength and to feel energized.
- ♥ **Offer to go to the store and run errands.** This can be a big help to a new mom, as well as an experienced one!
- ♥ **Spend time with your older children** so your partner can spend time with your baby, sleep, etc.
- ♥ **Cook a meal.** Warm food is always a treat and very satisfying. Make sure there are quick nutritious snacks easily available.
- ♥ **Make sure mom has help.** Encourage her to accept help from you, family members, neighbors or housekeepers.
- ♥ **Protect your partner's privacy.** Unwanted visitors and other intrusions to her privacy can put a strain on a new mother. Act as a buffer to others who may make unsupportive or inappropriate comments about breastfeeding. If you show a positive attitude, they will take their cue from you and follow your lead.

♥ **Establish good lines of communication.** The ability to share thoughts and feelings is the cornerstone of a close relationship. During this time of adjustment and changing roles, sharing and talking about feelings (both good and bad) is essential.

## Resuming Your Sexual Relationship

Breastfeeding is an intense relationship and involves lots of touching; therefore, your partner may have diminished sexual interest. Do not take this personally. Give her time and lots of understanding. Sexual activity should not resume at least until after her six week check up with the obstetrician or midwife. Then, whenever you both feel ready, you may resume your sexual activity.

It is important to remember that breastfeeding women may have less vaginal lubrication because of the hormones involved in producing breast milk. Plan ahead and have some lubricants available.

Perhaps you have read that breastfeeding can work as a method of birth control. While this method is not 100% effective, ALL of the following conditions should be met before considering relying on breastfeeding as a method of birth control:

- ♥ **Your partner is:** Breastfeeding around the clock, and has not yet had a menstrual period, and is less than 6 months post-partum.
- ♥ **Your baby is:** Using no pacifiers, and is not receiving any supplemental bottles or infant formula.

If all of the above conditions are not being met, then a barrier method of birth control should be used, such as a condom or diaphragm. Birth control pills (progestin only or mini-pills) may be started after 6 weeks when the breast milk supply is well established. However, if her milk supply decreases, she should discontinue the pills immediately and use barrier methods.

## Dads Need Support Too!

There are a host of new feelings and responsibilities for new dads. In addition, dads can feel left out of the “inner circle” of mother and baby. It helps to have someone to talk to. Your partner may be your “best friend” and you can share these feelings with her. If you need someone else to talk to, seek out another man whom you trust. Maybe your father, brother, brother-in-law, neighbor or clergyman. You will probably get the most understanding and practical advice from someone who has recently been through this life experience.

## Stay At Home Dads

The traditional role of father as bread-winner and mother as stay-at-home caregiver are evolving into more of a co-parenting style for many families. In some families, the situation warrants you to stay home with your baby and your partner to be the primary wage-earner. Many men adapt well to this role and while in this role, you can continue to promote breastfeeding. Your partner can breastfeed when she is home and you can give pumped breast milk in her absence.

## Parenting is One of the Most Rewarding Jobs

You will develop your own style and level of involvement depending upon your circumstances and your personality. Fathers who give love and support to their partners and participate in the care of their baby, enhance the family dynamics. As your baby grows and goes through each new stage, parents find themselves facing new challenges, constantly learning and becoming more than they imagined they could be. Being a parent is often hard work, but most parents will agree that it is a job with the richest of rewards.

## Helpful Resources

There are several good web sites on a father's role in breastfeeding. Run a search on “Fathers and Breastfeeding” and you will come up with several web sites.

## Books

**Becoming a Father** How to Nurture and Enjoy Your Family (Growing Family Series) by William Sears, Paul Froelich

**Fathering Right from the Start** Straight Talk About Pregnancy, Birth and Beyond by Jack Heinowitz, Ph.D., Wade F. Horn

**The New Father** A Dad's Guide to the First Year by Armin A. Brott

**The New Father Book** What Every Man Needs to Know to Be a Good Dad by Wade F. Horn, Alice Feinstein (Editor), Jeffrey Rosenberg

**Stay-at-Home Dads** The Essential Guide to Creating the New Family by Libby Gill

*Please remember that this is general breastfeeding information only and does not replace the advice of your health care provider. If you have a problem that you are unable to resolve quickly, seek help immediately.*

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References on File.

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