

Dads and Breastfeeding

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QUESTION: How can I help after my baby's birth?

ANSWER: The first 40 days after birth are a fragile and hectic time. New mothers need lots of support. Here are some things you can do.

- **Arrange for help.** In some cultures the early weeks are seen as distinct. Mothers are kept apart from others so they can focus on the baby. All chores are done for them. And when the first 40 days pass, mother is publicly praised for a job well done. In these cultures, few mothers get the “baby blues.” The more you can make the first 40 days like this, the better.
- **Learn about breastfeeding.** It is easy to support your partner when you believe in what she's doing. Do your reading. She'll love you for it! Also, breastfeeding saves big money. During baby's first year, you save \$1000-\$2000 in formula and \$300-400 in healthcare costs.
- **Limit visitors.** What your partner needs most now is rest, help, and time with your baby. If you allow some visitors, be sure they are there to help and support her choices. If not, delay their visit or keep it short. Others can upset her easily now, so surround her only with supporters. Avoid anyone she wants to clean and cook for.
- **Know who to call with breastfeeding questions.** Ask at the hospital for a list of names and phone numbers. Some hospitals have their own breastfeeding help line. Or, find someone local at www.ilca.org and www.lalecheleague.org.

QUESTION: If I don't bottle feed, what can I do with my newborn?

ANSWER: If you haven't spent much time with small babies, first know that they don't break. Babies love to be touched. You can get close in many ways other than feeding.

You are a father!
The pride, joy and
delight you feel
may be mixed with
fear, resentment,
and insecurity.

After all, your new role will last
for decades! And while you can't
breastfeed, you are key to your baby's
breastfeeding success.



- **Give your baby a bath.** This can be a fun time for both of you.
- **Change your baby's diaper.** This gets easy with practice. And when your baby is fully breastfed, diapers don't smell bad.
- **Bring your baby to your partner for feedings.** Yes, even during the night!
- **Spend time with your baby.** Put baby on your bare chest. Babies love to feel your skin against theirs. Give a massage.
- **Cuddle and walk.** This can help during fussy times. Movement calms babies.
- **Talk and sing to your baby.** This is how babies learn to talk.
- **Hold your baby.** Give your partner time to take a shower or eat a meal.
- **Play with your baby.** Moms and dads play in their own ways. This is how babies learn, and it can be fun for both of you.

Some dads want to give bottles with mother's milk. But if your baby is breastfeeding and gaining weight well, it may be best to put off giving a bottle until your baby is 4-6 weeks old and is practiced at breastfeeding. Some babies who get

bottles too early refuse the breast. It is fine for your partner to express some milk to keep herself comfortable during this time. In the meantime, any pumped milk can be frozen for later. If you and your partner decide to give bottles, you can use her expressed milk in the bottle.



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QUESTION: How can I help my partner breastfeed?

ANSWER: Here are some of the many ways.

- **Help her get comfortable.** Be sure she has what she needs. Help her with pillows. Bring her something to drink. Does she need a stool for her feet?
- **Help her get her sleep.** Remind her to nap when baby sleeps during the day. Offer to do her chores so that she can rest. Help her get baby latched on at night while lying down so she can doze off. Rest will help her recover from birth.
- **Run errands for her** so that she can focus on baby.
- **Spend time with older children** to help her rest and relax with baby.
- **Cook a meal.** And shop to make sure she has healthy snacks.
- **Talk and listen.** Share thoughts and feelings. While your roles are changing, it is vital to talk. Be honest about good and bad feelings. Give respect even when feelings run high.

QUESTION: Will breastfeeding affect our sex life?

ANSWER: Breastfeeding is a time of intense closeness between mother and baby and includes lots of touching. So at first your partner may have less interest in sex. Do not take this personally. Give her time and space.

When she’s had her six-week check-up and you’re both ready to resume having sex, keep in mind the hormones of breastfeeding may cause vaginal dryness. Plan ahead and have some lubricants on hand.

Have you heard that breastfeeding can help space babies? Research indicates it offers 98% protection from pregnancy, but only if ALL of the following are true:

- Your partner has had no menstrual bleeding and is fully breastfeeding around the clock.
- Your baby is younger than six months and gets no pacifiers or bottles.
- Your baby goes no longer than four hours between feedings during the day and six hours at night.

If ALL of the above are NOT true for you, do not rely on breastfeeding as your sole method of birth control. Talk to your partner’s health-care provider about other birth-control options. Methods such as condoms and diaphragms can be used. Another choice is progestin-only birth control pills (the “mini-pill”). This can be started at about six weeks, when your partner has a full milk supply. If her milk supply goes down, talk to her health-care provider about switching to another method.

QUESTION: Will breastfeeding make me a less-involved dad?

ANSWER: Years ago, more mothers and fathers expected to take on set roles after a baby’s birth. Most often, dad went to work and mom stayed home with baby. Breastfeeding was the mother’s job alone.

Today, dads tend to be more active in baby care and parenting. If your partner breastfeeds, you can still be an active parent. When mom is out and you care for baby, you can give pumped mother’s milk. In some families, dad stays home with baby while mother works outside the home. In this case, mother can breastfeed while home and pump her milk while away.

This is general information and does not replace the advice of your healthcare provider. If you have a problem you cannot solve quickly, seek help right away.

Every baby is different, and your baby may not be average. If in doubt, contact your physician or other healthcare provider.