

Dads and Breastfeeding



Congratulations On Becoming A Dad!

Having a baby brings delights and responsibilities, but there is no right way to parent and many couples rely on their instincts to raise their children. However, being an informed parent and discussing your feelings and what you both want for your baby helps to create a harmonious home.

Why Breastfeed? The Benefits

Breastmilk contains antibodies that help to protect against a wide range of infections, and this living fluid (which can not be replicated) also contains active cells that mop up bacteria and viruses. Artificially fed infants suffer from more ailments and experience more hospital admissions than breastfed babies. Breastfed babies have protection against a host of maladies, ranging from ear infections, allergies and obesity, to multiple sclerosis and heart attacks in later life. Breastmilk changes in composition from day to day and during a feed the milk changes from thirst quenching to hunger satisfying. We know it to have the right amount of vitamins, proteins, fat, lactose and other components in perfect balance to your baby's growing needs. Artificial milk is the same every day, all the time. Studies suggest that breastfeeding may positively affect a baby's brain development and IQ. Breastfeeding contributes to your baby's optimal oral development and a decreased risk of tooth decay.

And the benefits do not stop with the baby – a breastfeeding mother lowers her risk of contracting several forms of cancer during her life. Women who breastfeed may experience less postnatal anxiety and depression because breastfeeding triggers and releases oxytocin that can help them relax and feel less stressed. A breastfeeding mum is likely to regain her pre-pregnancy shape faster than a mother who feeds her baby artificially as breastfeeding helps mobilise fat stores and burns up to 500 calories a day (a bottle feeding mum would need to swim 30 laps or ride a bicycle for more than an hour to achieve this!).

If your baby is breastfed there is no need to get up in the night to sterilise bottles, breastmilk is always at the right temperature and you don't have to cart around huge bags of equipment when you leave the house. And breastmilk is free. Even if a baby is drinking expressed breastmilk and you need to buy feeding accessories, you will still save money. The average bottle-feeding mother will spend around £1,700 a year on artificial milk and equipment. And if your responsibilities include changing, babies who are breastfed have much less smelly nappies...

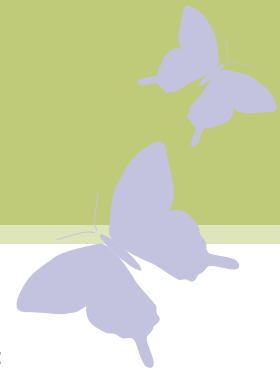


Photo courtesy of www.randallphotography.co.uk

How Can You Help?

Nine out of ten women who give up breastfeeding during the first six weeks stop before they want to. Often the cause is lack of support and information, and the attitude of fathers plays a major role, too. Although one often hears women say they 'couldn't' breastfeed, you may be surprised to learn that fewer than 3% of women are physically unable to do so. Breastfeeding is a new skill to learn, and your partner will need encouragement and reassurance. You could remind her that she does not need to commit to breastfeeding, but to take it one day at a time. Breastfeeding even for the first few days will provide your baby with colostrum (first milk), which contains antibodies, is low in fat, high in carbohydrates and protein and is extremely easy to digest. In addition it has a laxative effect on the baby, helping to eliminate meconium faster, as bilirubin (elevated when jaundice occurs) is eliminated from the body through the stools.

Practical help is also extremely important. Some women may experience difficulties early on in breastfeeding, such as engorgement (extremely full breasts), which can be helped by applying cold compresses, changing to warm 20 minutes before a feed and expressing off a little milk prior to feeding, or cracked and sore nipples. The baby needs to take a big mouthful of breast to effectively milk the breast so the nipple is safely protected at the back of the baby's mouth. If it still hurts, help is available from a number of breastfeeding organisations.



Make sure you understand what could happen, and what can be done to prevent the problem and alleviate the symptoms in the meantime – she will really appreciate your help! In the early days you may need to be on hand to fend off or organise well wishing visitors to help. Breastfeeding women feel thirstier, so ensure she has a glass of water near her when feeding, and encourage her to eat a balanced nutritious diet. You can help to do your fair share of the housework, so that she can take the time needed to feed your baby in a relaxed atmosphere. If your partner is worried about breastfeeding in public, you can help her out by making sure she is not in full view of others and reassuring her that she is doing well.

Human milk is quickly digested, and the newborn infant's tummy is about the size of a walnut, so needs frequent feeding. We are a continuous contact species, both for psychological and physical reasons, which means new babies are designed to breastfeed often, about 8-12 times in 24 hours.

If you smoke it is a gift for your baby if you stop - or at least smoke outside. Studies show that cot death is more likely if a parent smokes.

Some fathers worry that they will feel jealous and left out of the bonding process that is going on with mother and baby – but there is no need. There are lots of things you can do other than feeding: change, bath and rock your baby, place him on your bare chest for skin to skin contact, give him a massage, or buy a sling and take him out to a friend's house, or for a walk, to give mum a rest.

Maintaining intimacy is very important following the birth of a baby. And it's not always easy even to manage some time alone together. But experimenting with new ways to share intimacy will help you both to get used to the stresses of becoming a parent. A breastfeeding woman may very likely feel "touched-out" by the end of a long day, which is hardly surprising if she has been feeding frequently. However, this does not mean that she does not want to be touched or cuddled at all. She may just need a bit of time to switch roles. Nurture the relationship you have with your baby's mother through good communication.

Your support is invaluable in boosting your baby's mother's confidence and studies have shown that a mother is more likely to continue to breastfeed if she has the support of the baby's father. Tell her she is doing well, and let friends know that in order for her to successfully breastfeed she will feed when the baby needs to be fed, possibly in front of them. As it is the most natural thing in the world they need to take it in their stride, and know that you will stand up for your partner's right to breastfeed.

Paid Paternity Leave

You can take statutory paternity leave if you:

- are an employee with a contract of employment (this does not include most agency workers and sub contractors)
- are the biological father of the child, or are the mother's husband or partner
- have been with your employer for at least 26 weeks by the end of the 15th week before the beginning of the week when the baby is due
- will be fully involved in the child's upbringing and are taking the time off to support the mother or care for the baby

This leave is paid if you earn at least the lower earnings limit (LEL) for national insurance contributions. If you earn less than the LEL you have the right to unpaid paternity leave if you meet the other conditions, and could receive Income Support while on paternity leave.

You can take either one or two weeks, but not odd days. If you take two weeks, they must be taken together. You can choose to start the leave:

- on the day the baby is born
- a number of days or weeks after the baby is born
- from a specific date after the first day of the week in which the baby is expected to be born

Your leave can start on any day of the week (but not before the baby is born) but must finish within 56 days of the baby being born or, if the baby is born before the week it was due, within 56 days of the first day of that week. If your partner has a multiple birth you are only allowed one period of paternity leave.

Do check your contract of employment as some employers have their own paternity leave arrangements, although you can always choose the statutory arrangement if this suits you better.

Further Information and Reading:

- *Becoming a Father: How to Nurture and Enjoy your Family* William Sears
- <http://direct.gov.uk/en/Parents>
- www.fathersdirect.com

Useful Organisations

National Childbirth Trust (NCT) Breastfeeding Line: 0300 330 0771
La Leche League: 0845 120 2918

This information is available to download as a pdf from:

www.lansinoh.co.uk