

Dads and Breastfeeding

QUESTION: How can I help my partner be successful with breastfeeding?

ANSWER: The first weeks after having a baby can be both exciting and overwhelming—you are all learning a lot, including how to breastfeed.

- **Arrange for help.** In some cultures, the early weeks are seen as special. Mothers are kept apart from others so they can focus on the baby. All chores are done for them. After this time, mother receives public praise 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. Attend a prenatal breastfeeding course. Read up on the benefits of breastfeeding and the risks of not breastfeeding.
- **Watch and learn** from those who help your partner learn to breastfeed. Ask questions.
- **Talk to other fathers** about their experiences with breastfeeding. It is helpful to share your thoughts and feelings—you need support too!
- **Limit visitors** to those who are supportive and helpful. This is the time for you and your partner to learn how to care for your baby. Keep visits short or ask visitors to help clean and cook, so you tend to your baby and get some rest.
- **Get help.** There are many support people available for hire that can help you with household chores and/or basic breastfeeding support in your home—such as a postpartum doula (www.dona.org).
- **Know your resources.** Find out if your hospital has a breastfeeding help line or support group. There may be other local breastfeeding mom to mom support groups available, (www.la lecheleague.org or www.breastfeedingusa.org). Or find a local breastfeeding expert, such as a lactation consultant (www.ilca.org).

Welcome to fatherhood!

Learn some ways to help make breastfeeding a success. You are key to your baby getting the best from the very beginning.



QUESTION: Can I bottle feed my baby?

ANSWER: Yes. If your baby was not born preterm or with special needs, wait to bottle feed until your baby is at least 4 weeks old. This is the time it usually takes for your baby to learn to breastfeed well and be able to go back and forth between breastfeeding and bottle feeding without any issues. You can bottle feed breast milk that your partner has expressed/pumped.

QUESTION: How can I help my partner when she is breastfeeding?

ANSWER:

- **Learn your baby’s hunger cues.** Early hunger cues include: sucking sounds, moving around, tongue and hand-to-mouth movements. If you see these, bring your baby to your partner to breastfeed.
- **Help her get comfortable.** Be sure she has enough pillows to support the baby, her arms and back. For some positions, she may need your extra hands to get the baby just right. Remind her to take a deep breath and relax her shoulders and body once the baby is latched on.
- **Help her stay hydrated and nourished.** Bring her a drink and healthy snack while she is breastfeeding.
- **Help after breastfeeding.** Offer to burp and change your baby’s diaper.



The first weeks after having a baby can be both exciting & overwhelming! New mothers need lots of support.

- **Encourage her to take a nap at least once a day.** Sometimes, we don't realize how sleep deprived we are the first weeks after having a baby and a little extra sleep can make a big difference!
- **Praise her.** Tell her you are proud of her and that she is a wonderful mother.

QUESTION: How can my baby and I get to know each other if I don't bottle feed?

ANSWER: Plan to spend some time doing something you enjoy with your baby each day. Here are some suggestions.

- **Hold your baby.** Skin to skin or swaddled—babies love to be held. Put your diapered baby on your bare chest to hear your heartbeat and feel your body warmth. Or swaddle your baby and rock her to sleep.
 - Talk and sing to your baby.
 - Take your baby for a walk.
 - Give your baby a bath.
 - Play with your baby.
 - Read a book to your baby.

QUESTION: Will breastfeeding affect our sex life?

ANSWER: When your baby is first born, your partner will need time for her body to recover after having a baby. Once she has had her six-week postpartum check-up, she may be physically and emotionally ready to start having sex again. It is important for you to discuss your feelings and readiness with each other. Here are some additional things to keep in mind.

References

Mohrbacher N. *Breastfeeding Answers Made Simple: A Guide for Helping Mothers*. Amarillo, TX: Hale Publishing, LP; 2010.
Riordan J, Wambach K. *Breastfeeding and Human Lactation*. 4th ed. Sudbury, MA: Jones & Bartlett Publishers; 2010.
Spangler A. *Breastfeeding: A Parent's Guide*. 9th ed. Cincinnati, OH: Specialty Lithographing Co; 2010.

- Some mothers may have less desire for sex due to fear of pain or pregnancy or just being tired.
- Many mothers have vaginal dryness due to hormone changes while breastfeeding. Using a lubricant can make sex more enjoyable and less painful during this time.
- During sex, your partner may have an orgasm that causes the hormone, oxytocin to be released. This is the hormone that also causes milk to be released from the breasts. So, you may get a little wet! This will happen less if your partner breastfeeds before having sex.

QUESTION: Can my partner get pregnant if she is breastfeeding?

ANSWER: Yes, she can. Although, it is possible to use the natural child spacing method if:

1. Your baby is less than six months old.
2. Your partner is exclusively breastfeeding which means breastfeeding on demand, not bottle feeding or pumping.
3. Your partner has not had her period yet after having her baby. But keep in mind that usually a woman's body ovulates (releases an egg) before her period, so you may not know if you are at risk for pregnancy.

The natural child spacing method does not provide 100% protection from pregnancy so it is a good idea to use a back-up form of birth control if you want to avoid pregnancy. Talk to your health care provider for more information.

REMEMBER:

- Educate yourself
- Be supportive
- Get help with breastfeeding if needed
- Talk to you partner & be open about your feelings

Sometimes breastfeeding doesn't work out for a variety of reasons, but keep in mind you both did what you could to try to make it successful. Consider pumping and bottle feeding as an alternative if you still want to provide breast milk. Most of all, relax, love your new family, and enjoy all of the new experiences you will have with your baby.

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, if in doubt, contact your physician or other healthcare provider.