

E Nurture

A newsletter for breastfeeding mothers
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What about Dad?

Fathers of breastfed babies have a very important role to fill. Dad's support, approval, and encouragement of the mother are all vital to the success of the breastfeeding experience. As he watches the bond develop between mom and baby, he can take great pride in knowing that he helped to foster that special relationship.

Moms and babies have already begun to know each other before birth. After birth this relationship continues to grow and develop, and becomes the prototype for all future relationships. The next person to be included is dad. The baby has heard his voice before birth. Now he learns the difference in dad's touch, body rhythms, and way of holding the baby. From the base of a secure relationship developed with both parents, the baby begins to reach out to others (siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, friends, etc.) and develops a network of caring.

Because breastfeeding is a female biological function, male partners take on the role of protector, provider, and helpmate to the nursing mom and baby. Some practical ways to do this include:

- ♥ bring the baby to mom to nurse
- ♥ watch with pride while she nourishes the baby
- ♥ help with burping, diaper changing, bathing, etc.
- ♥ spend time with the baby between and after feedings: hold, cuddle, quiet, comfort, play, sing, rock, talk, walk,
- ♥ wear a baby carrier and hold the baby in it as you move about the house doing little things.

Also of great importance are the "housekeeping" ways of helping:

- ♥ fix meals and beverages
- ♥ cook and do dishes
- ♥ grocery shopping
- ♥ laundry
- ♥ clean up the house
- ♥ care for the other children

All of these things help to free the mom to devote more of her time and energy to her recovery from childbirth and care of the newborn in the first weeks.

Today's father welcomes a more active role in child rearing right from the beginning. Take the time to learn the facts about breastfeeding. This can be done by reading magazine articles, watching videos, attending classes, and discussing the things the expectant mother is learning. Support her decision to breastfeed by being informed and encouraging.

If problems arise, encourage her to keep trying and to get help and answers to her questions. Build her self-confidence by telling her what a good job she is doing as a mother, and how proud you are of her. Offer her your patient and loving support as you both adjust to life with the baby.

Breast milk is the perfect food for babies because it is human milk. It contains all the nutrients that help human babies to grow their best and be healthy. Breastfed babies don't get sick as often as those who are formula fed. They have fewer ear infections, less stomach upset, less diarrhea, and fewer allergies. Children who were breastfed have been shown to have higher IQs because the components of breast milk promote brain growth. Breastfeeding is convenient because the milk is always ready and at the right temperature. It is economical, with savings from breastfeeding for the first year estimated at \$1000-\$1200.

Breastfeeding is healthier for moms, too. The hormones produced while breastfeeding help her uterus (womb) to return to normal size sooner. These hormones also help the mom to be more relaxed. Breastfeeding moms lose weight faster after the baby's birth. She also

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lowers her risk of developing breast cancer and ovarian cancer by breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding can be done very modestly so that no one can see the mother's breast exposed. If she lifts her shirt from the bottom, the baby will cover her body and the shirt can be pulled down to the baby's mouth. A shirt with buttons should be opened from the bottom only as far as is needed. A small blanket or cloth can be used as a tent to hide the nursing baby from view. Breastfeeding does not have a negative effect on the shape of the breasts. Heredity determines what the breasts will look like as a woman matures.

Breast milk is made on a supply and demand basis. As the baby nurses and empties the milk, the woman's body makes more to replace it. Your baby's mother will be able to produce enough milk for the baby's needs, and will increase the amount of milk she produces as the baby's appetite grows. Breastfeeding is not painful if the baby latches-on properly, with a wide-open mouth. Encourage the mom to learn about breastfeeding so that she will be able to help the baby to do this.

Special foods are not required to breastfeed successfully. Moms need a normal, well balanced diet of a variety of

foods - just as they would if they were not breastfeeding. She will need about 300-500 extra calories a day, but she could get them just by eating an extra peanut butter sandwich and a glass of milk.

Dads sometimes feel left out when a mom breastfeeds the baby. They worry that they are being replaced by the baby in the mother's life. For the first weeks, while she is recovering from childbirth, it is normal for a new mom to be very involved with the baby. This is a protective instinct that has helped the human race to survive. Because babies are helpless, they need their mothers to be close by and watchfully caring for them. The mom may be feeling "touched-out" because of all the physical contact with the baby. She also will be tired from the 24-hour baby care and physical recovery from pregnancy, labor, and birth.

Give her some time. Develop your own relationship with the baby. Support the mom and her breastfeeding by your positive words and actions. Let her know that you love her and are proud of her. Soon life will settle into a "new normal." You will have more time and energy to devote to each other. And you will grow closer as you experience the joy of helping your child to discover the world.

Do you have other questions, concerns, or comments?
Moms and dads can call the lactation consultants at
The Family Birth Place at Park Ridge Hospital.

Breastfeeding Helpline
(585) 368-4033