

# Dads and Breastfeeding

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

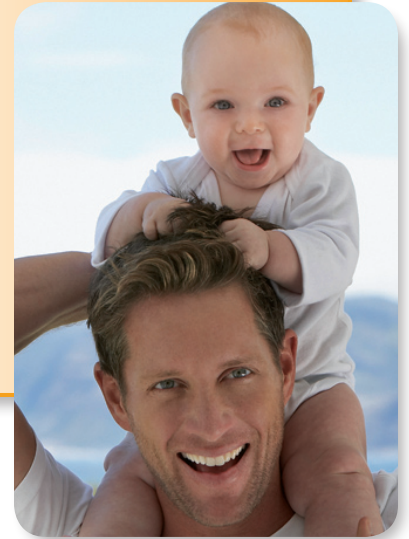
**ANSWER:** The first 40 days after birth are a fragile and hectic time. New mothers need lots of support. Here are some things you can do.

- **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. 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. Do your reading. She'll love you for it!
- **Know that breastfeeding saves big money.** During baby's first year, you save about \$2,000 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 easily upset her now, so surround her only with supporters. Avoid visitors 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](http://www.ilca.org) and [www.la lecheleague.org](http://www.la lecheleague.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 easily. Babies love to be touched. You can get close in many ways other than feeding.

*Congratulations, you are a father! The pride, joy and delight you feel may be mixed with fear, nervousness, 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.*



- **Spend time with your baby.** Put baby on your bare chest. Babies love to feel your skin against theirs. Give a massage.
- **Give your baby a bath.** This can be a fun time for both of you.
- **Bring your baby to your partner for feedings.** Yes, even during the night!
- **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.
- **Change your baby's diaper.** This gets easy with practice. And when your baby is fully breastfed, diapers don't smell bad.
- **Hold your baby** to 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.



*“The first 40 days after birth are a fragile and hectic time. New mothers need lots of support.”*

Some dads want to give bottles of 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 has gotten lots of practice breastfeeding. Some babies who get bottles too early may 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 give her expressed milk in the bottle.

### **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.
- **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. At night, give her any needed help in getting the baby latched on deeply 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 a lubricant 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 reached full milk production. If her milk decreases, talk to her health-care provider about switching to another method.

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

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

Today, many dads are 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, if in doubt, contact your physician or other healthcare provider.*