

Men's Involvement in Breastfeeding



BY

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I remember my father nearly two decades ago when my niece was born telling all of us young ones about the advantages of breastfeeding and so many allied matter. He narrated it to us so lucidly interlacing it with anecdotes that it proved to be a very inspirational and motivating interaction for the entire family. Many men wrongly think that breastfeeding is strictly restricted to women and babies. They see their role as that of an inactive observer who has no control on the process. But men actually have tremendous potential to either facilitate or undermine the success of breastfeeding. Understanding the importance of their role is the first step in equipping fathers to help their breastfeeding wives.

Setting the Family Tone:

The first thing the man can do is to generate a helpful family environment toward breastfeeding. If he views breastfeeding as making a positive difference in the health and well-being of his baby and as a main concern for his wife and child, this attitude will set the tone for achieving success. A father who views a baby's continual presence as intrusive will weaken breastfeeding. The father who assumes that his baby will accompany the couple to all social interactions has given breastfeeding his strong approval. But there's a big difference between a man who agrees to let his wife breastfeed and one who consciously creates an atmosphere of success.

Giving Support and Encouragement:

Breastfeeding can be psychologically challenging, bodily very tiring, and uncomfortable at times. Almost all new mothers experience doubts about their capability to care for a dependent newborn. Breastfeeding mothers harbor extra fears about the sufficiency of their milk supply or the accuracy of their breastfeeding method, or their skill to surmount lactation troubles. Fathers can play a key role in supporting their breastfeeding wife's self-assurance by praising their efforts and offering words of encouragement.

Providing Practical Help:

A father can help in so many ways that it's hard to imagine why many men feel left out when their wives breastfeed. A father can go to the baby when he or she awakens and bring the hungry infant to his wife. After the first feed on one side, he can burp the baby and help arouse the infant for the second side. When the feeding is complete, the father can change the infant and put him or her down to sleep.

Building a Relationship with the Baby:

Although the mutual interaction between a breastfeeding baby and her mother is one of the strongest bonds in nature, this doesn't lessen the significance of a baby's early relationship with her father. Instead of feeling left out of the nursing bond, fathers can cultivate their own exclusive bond with their baby. Much has been written recently about the problem of "father hunger" among American children. As a result of divorce, single parenthood, and emotionally distant fathers, innumerable children

grow up with little or no contact with their fathers. Today, nearly 40 percent of America's children do not live with their father. Not only has fatherlessness become the single most important determinant of child poverty, fatherless children are at increased risk for violent behavior, unlawful doings, drug misuse, school failure, joining a gang, and other social problems. Children ought to have the right to have a healthy, loving relationship with two parents, and fathers deserve to know the truth about their crucial role.

As a father, the man can begin by connecting with his child through touch, one of the most strongly developed senses at birth. He can hold, carry, rock, caress, massage, and stroke his baby and let her fall asleep. When the baby is in a quiet alert state, it is most receptive to engage visually. It prefers to look at the human face over any other visual stimulus. Within a few months, babies already perceive their fathers as principal sources of play and motor movement, different-but no less important than-mothers. If the wife is more skillful at comforting, bathing and entertaining the baby, it isn't necessary for the man to let her be the chief infant custodian. Instead, the man can explain that he wants to become proficient at caring for and nurturing the baby. Mothers need not come to their husband's rescue as soon as the baby starts to cry. Instead they can allow the husband opportunities to soothe or entertain the baby or sing her to sleep. One prudent mother decided not to correct her husband when he put the newborn's disposable diaper on rearward the first time. An affectionate father's genuine attempt to contribute in infant care was more important than whether the clothing breaks are in proper position.

[NOTE: I am thankful to Marianne R. Neifert whose article from Dr. Mom's Guide to Breastfeeding was of great help in preparing this matter]