

# **THE FATHER'S ROLE IN BREASTFEEDING:** **Crucial for STRONG support and encouragement.**

## **WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT THAT YOUR BABY AND HIS/HER MUM START AND CONTINUE TO BREASTFEED?**

Whether or not your baby is breastfed will make an enormous difference to his/her physical, mental and emotional health. Your baby will enjoy those benefits now and throughout his/her whole life. The many benefits of breastfeeding include:

- Baby will be less likely to get ill, need a doctor or a hospital. Either as a child or as an adult.
- Baby will be less likely to have an allergy or become obese.
- Baby's brain will grow to its true intellectual potential.
- Baby's mum will be less likely to suffer seriously debilitating or life threatening illnesses for the rest of her life.

No money can buy these benefits. They are not provided by any artificial replacement for mother's real milk.

Also, the whole family will benefit from not having the financial drain of buying in artificial substitute milk. And when the family goes out there is no feeding stuff to carry and make up!

## **QUOTATIONS**

*"Fatherhood is the ultimate manhood. Being a father is the one thing that only a man can do. Take pride in it and apologise to no one for giving your time and first consideration to your family."* Dr David Stewart, father of 5.

*"Providing understanding and support for the breastfeeding pair is one of the most valuable investments you can make in the future health and well-being of your family."* Dr William Sears, paediatrician.

## **DO EVERYTHING IN YOUR POWER TO ALLOW THE NEW MOTHER-BABY ATTACHMENT TO MATURE.**

This is the key. Mum and baby need to establish a strong bond, plentiful milk supply and enjoyable breastfeeding relationship. As the new dad you can make this happen by your attitude, actions and words:

1. **BE WISE** in how you use your paternity leave. Take as long as you can manage. Take it when the new mum and baby would otherwise be at home alone. Concentrate just on the needs of the new mum and baby (and any other children.) Let everything else wait.
2. **FIX IT** so that the household 'ticks over'. Take over yourself or welcome help from others. Or buy in help e.g. a cleaner, supermarket delivery, mother's help.
3. **GUARD** against too many visitors. Let others know when your new little family need to be alone. E.g. turn off the phone and put a 'do not disturb' sign on the front door.
4. **TAKE CHARGE** of your other children. Distract them with fun activities and exercise. See that they get enough attention, sleep and wholesome food.
5. **PROTECT** the new mum from well meaning but unhelpful advice that undermines breastfeeding. Even if it comes from your own mum!
6. **SEEK OUT** skilled help if any problems crop up. Problems are more easily solved if you call for help straight away. Problems with soreness or not enough milk can usually be fixed easily if you track down the right help early on. So keep looking until you find that help. The new mum will have been given a contact number for a Breastfeeding Counsellor or Breastfeeding Peer Supporter. Maybe make that first call yourself.

7. RESPECT the new mum's instincts. Nature isn't daft and maternal instincts have ensured the survival of our species for millions of years. The new mum's breastfeeding hormones drive her to mothering through breastfeeding.
8. FIGHT OFF any pressures to separate mum and baby.
9. SEARCH for details of local mums' breastfeeding groups. Urge the new mum to attend right away so she gets this vital mother-to-mother contact. She will get ongoing support to carry on breastfeeding as long as she and baby want. It will make all the difference.
10. ADMIRE and PRAISE your baby's mother. Your encouragement will work wonders.
11. FIRMLY RESIST pressures to feed baby anything other than mum's real milk until baby reaches six months of age. Only then do you add solids to baby's diet of mother's milk.
12. BE MATURE and meet your baby's need for you. Your baby needs you to be an involved father and not a substitute mother. Spend time with your baby. Explore how to form your own unique father-baby relationship.

### **WHAT CAN A DAD DO, OTHER THAN ACTUALLY FEED THE BABY?**

Many fathers find the following are useful things to do. You will soon be able to add your own ideas:

- a) Embrace mum and baby as they nurse.
- b) Give baby a bath.
- c) Help baby feel more comfortable: rock, burp, massage.
- d) 'Wear' baby in a sling, carrier or wrap.
- e) Sing and talk to your baby. Your own voice will be familiar since listening to it from the womb.
- f) Play with your baby.
- g) Cuddle or carry baby. The 'colic hold' (baby face down along dad's forearm with limbs dangling) works a treat to calm an unsettled baby.
- h) Take baby out for a walk using the pram or sling. You will give baby a change of scene and fresh air. It is fun to introduce your baby to the delights of the big wide world.
- i) Change nappies, making the most of the eye contact, chat and caring opportunities.
- j) Organise outings and treats. Plan dates for the three of you together.

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

With breastfeeding, dad's attitude and involvement can make all the difference between success and failure. To learn more, see other sources of information:

- Book: *Becoming a Father: How to Nurture & Enjoy Your Family* by William Sears: LLLI, 2003
- Chapter 10, 'The Manly Art of Fathering' from the Book: *The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition: LLLI, 2004
- Leaflet about Dad's role: *Fathers and Breastfeeding*: NCT, 2007  
<http://www.nct.org.uk/info-centre/publications/view/37>
- Leaflet about the difference that breastfeeding makes: *Reasons to be Proud* NCT, 2005

©Deborah Robertson IBCLC, Revised 2009. Deborah is a Lactation Consultant in Medway, Kent who provides antenatal and postnatal breastfeeding consultations for parents as well as Breastfeeding Specialist Study Days for health professionals and volunteers. [www.breastfeedingspecialist.com](http://www.breastfeedingspecialist.com)

*Permission is granted to copy and distribute this article as long as it is kept entire, original author is credited and it is used in accordance with the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes.*