

Father's Breastfeeding FAQ

As a father, is there anything I can do to help support my wife and baby with breastfeeding?

Fathers can and should play a vital role in the breastfeeding experience. Research shows that fathers who are supportive and encourage breastfeeding ensure that their babies will breastfeed longer. When fathers are not supportive, they may interfere with breastfeeding and cause the mother to wean her baby early. By being supportive of breastfeeding, you enhance the health and well-being of both mother and baby throughout their lifetimes. During the first few days and weeks, your love, protection, and encouragement go a long way in getting breastfeeding off to a good start.

Let hospital or birthing-center staff know your baby is breastfed and is not to be given supplements. Make sure the baby is breastfed within 30 minutes of birth and that he nurses every 1½ to 2 hours around the clock. The mother should be nursing “on demand” or whenever your baby shows signs of hunger. This will help build up the mother’s milk supply. Never supplement with water or formula — this interferes with the mother's milk supply and confuses the baby. The only food or drink your baby needs during the first 6 months of life is breast milk.

Make sure there are not too many visitors and that visitors do not overstay. Explain that mother and baby need their rest and time together. It is important that you spend time with the mother and baby as well. Dr. William Sears, author of *Becoming a Father*, suggests that a dad let the hospital staff know — the day his baby is born — that the family will have a private time together. Close the door to your room and sit with your arm around the mother as your baby suckles at her breast. Speak softly to them, and gently stroke your baby. Your loving support and attention will be rewarded.

Mother and baby need to focus on breastfeeding the first few weeks. They need time together, rest, and someone to bring the mother meals, snacks, and water. You can bring the baby to bed with you or have the baby close by so that the mother does not have to get up during the night. Help with housework, laundry, and meals or ask someone to do those things for you. Spend time with your baby — singing, talking, bathing, diapering, or dressing him or her — so mother can take a shower or have some relaxing time alone.

If well meaning family members and friends are critical of breastfeeding or hint that the mother is not breastfeeding “correctly,” stand up for her, even if the critic is your mother or mother-in-law. You might help alleviate their fears by giving them the WIC brochure *Just for Grandparents or Breastfeeding: The Best Choice*. By educating them, you strengthen the support mother and baby need to continue breastfeeding longer.

It is important that the baby's mother feels she is doing a good job. Words of praise and encouragement go a long way. By building her confidence to breastfeed your baby, you are building her confidence as a parent and strengthening your bond with her.