Help Dads to Support Moms and Breastfeeding

**Did You Know?**
Research tells us that support from her partner is an important factor in a woman’s decision to breastfeed her baby! Since their support is so important, Dads (or Dads-to-be) should be educated on the benefits of breastfeeding.

**THIS SECTION INCLUDES TIPS ON:**
1. Teaching Dad about the benefits of breastfeeding.
2. Addressing Dad’s concerns related to his partner breastfeeding.
3. Encouraging Dad to support Mom during pregnancy.
4. Supporting Dad to support Mom after pregnancy and while breastfeeding.

1. **Educate Dads about the Many Benefits of Breastfeeding**

Dad may not have heard the many reasons to breastfeed. WIC staff can teach Dad about the benefits to his baby. You may want to talk about some of the following benefits:

- Breastfeeding stimulates brain growth. Mom’s milk helps the baby’s IQ reach full potential.
- It may mean fewer doctor visits. Mom’s milk lowers the baby’s risk of allergies, asthma and infections.
- Breastfeeding is less expensive than formula.
- It helps Mom stay calm and bond with the baby. The hormones produced while nursing help Mom relax.
- Breastfeeding helps Mom to lose the baby weight.
- It protects Mom against excessive bleeding after delivery, delays the return of her period, and lowers her risk of cancer.

“Getting started breastfeeding and keeping it up for the first year of the baby’s life - as the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends - is so much easier when the new mother and father act as a team, encouraging each other and helping each other to be supportive, involved parents, nursing experts agree. First-time parents, especially, need to remember that they need to work together to learn how to become good parents...A new mother is just as scared as the father is of doing the wrong thing. Confidence comes with spending time with the baby ... and with practice.”

-“Breastfeeding: How Can Dad Help?” by Robina Riccitiello
2. **Listen to and Address Dad’s Concerns about Breastfeeding**

Dads may have concerns about his partner breastfeeding. WIC staff should:

- Listen to Dad and acknowledge his concerns as valid.
- Respond to Dad’s concerns in a supportive way. You can use the table following this as a guide:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dad’s Concern about Breastfeeding</th>
<th>Reassure Dad…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling left out if his partner breastfeeds</td>
<td>Dad’s support is so important while Mom is breastfeeding, and there are lots of ways he can help (see the next page). There are also lots of ways Dad can bond with baby without being involved with feeding! Soothing, bathing, playing, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pain his partner may experience with breastfeeding</td>
<td>In general, there should be little or no pain with breastfeeding. If Mom and baby are having a hard time, Dad can take Mom to WIC or her doctor for help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whether his partner will make enough milk</td>
<td>In most cases, if Mom is eating healthily and drinking plenty of water, she will make the amount of milk that baby needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That breastfeeding will interfere with his relationship or sex life with his partner</td>
<td>Having a baby changes your sex life whether the baby is given Mom’s milk or formula. The first 6 weeks are tiring for Mom. Her body needs time to heal from the trauma of birth. Both of you will need to adjust to the big change in your home life. You will need to plan for time alone with each other. This will be true no matter how the baby is fed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That breastfeeding will ruin his partner’s breasts</td>
<td>Breastfeeding does not damage Mom’s breasts! Any changes in her breasts’ appearance are caused by pregnancy itself, whether or not she breastfeeds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whether breastfeeding will be too difficult for Mom</td>
<td>Dad can make things much easier on Mom by providing the support outlined in the next few pages.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. **Encourage Dad to Support Mom before the Baby is Born**

Once the couple knows they are expecting a baby, Dad’s main role is providing support to Mom during the pregnancy. A father’s early involvement will strengthen the bond between baby and Dad and ease the transition into fatherhood.

WIC staff can recommend that Dad:

- Attend prenatal classes to learn about breastfeeding and how to be supportive during labor.
- Pack the hospital bag (including a change of clothes and toiletries for himself).
- Prepare for the baby by getting items like a crib, car seat and stroller.
- Care for Mom by doing things such as household chores or rubbing her feet or back.
- Make sure that Mom can get the rest she needs.
4. Help Dad to Support Mom while she is Breastfeeding

When the baby is born, WIC staff can suggest to Dad that he:

❖ Encourage Mom to breastfeed:
  o Reassure Mom that he has lots of ways to bond with baby besides feeding.
  o Ask Mom what she would like him to do for her and the baby.
  o Praise Mom for doing a great job.
  o Be vocal in his support. Tell Mom how much he appreciates what she is doing.

❖ Be a part of the feeding team:
  o Watch baby for early signs of hunger (turning toward Mom’s breast, sucking on a fist or making sucking noises) and bring baby to Mom to breastfeed.
  o Bring Mom water and a healthy snack while she breastfeeds – it is important she eats healthy foods and stays hydrated in order to make enough milk.
  o Make sure Mom is comfortable and has all the things she needs like a pillow for support, nipple cream, burp cloths, etc.
  o Keep her company or entertained while she is breastfeeding.
  o Help set up the breast pump if Mom pumps.

❖ Take on other baby care duties and make sure Mom gets enough rest:
  o Hold, cuddle and bathe the baby.
  o Be in charge of diaper duty.
  o Get up with the baby at night (for non-feeding related awakenings) so Mom can get a little more sleep.
  o Play with the baby or take him/her on a walk so that Mom can take a shower.

❖ Help out by taking on household duties:
  o Help with chores and prepare healthy meals.
  o Care for the other children while Mom is breastfeeding.

❖ Join a peer Dad group where men discuss and learn about supporting their partners to breastfeed. (See more about this in the “Peer Groups” section of toolkit.)

Tips on How “Dad Can Help, Too”

- Limit visitors and visiting times, especially at the hospital when mom and baby are learning to breastfeed.
- Get to know normal baby behavior, especially for crying and sleeping.
- Encourage mom with words of support; things will get easier after about 6 weeks.
- Speak up for mom’s wishes.
- Take mom to get breastfeeding help, if she needs it.
- Ask grandma to pick the kids up from school or ask a friend to bring over a meal.
- Help with cleaning, laundry and other chores.
- Help make healthy meals.
- Play with or care for baby while mom gets some rest.

- from A WIC Guide to Breastfeeding
ACTION ITEMS FOR WIC STAFF:

- Listen to and acknowledge Dads’ concerns around breastfeeding.
- Educate and/or reassure Dads about the benefits of breastfeeding.
- Provide suggestions of how Dad can support Mom during pregnancy.
- Provide suggestions of how Dad can support Mom after the baby is born and while she is breastfeeding.

"When the baby’s dad wants mom to breastfeed, she is more likely to breastfeed, be successful at it and breastfeed for a longer amount of time. Daddy’s support is so important."

-"Breastfeeding and Dads" from Maryland WIC

Resources

- Using Loving Support to Grow and Glow in WIC: Breastfeeding Training for Local WIC Staff (Module 4: Barriers to Breastfeeding, p.8-11)
- Loving Support© Through Peer Counseling: A Journey Together (p.51)
- Breastfeeding: How Can Dad Help? from Oregon WIC
- A WIC Guide to Breastfeeding from California WIC
- Breastfeeding Duties for Dads from Mama Say What?!
- Mother’s Milk for Daddy’s Baby – Posters from Pennsylvania WIC
- “What If Dad Feels Left Out” – Informational flyer from Pennsylvania WIC
- Fathers Supporting Breastfeeding – Brochures and posters from USDA
- Give a Breastfeeding Mom your Love and Support: (10 Tips for Dad brochure and Encouragement poster/brochure) from USDA
- Magical Bond of Love: “Dads Play an Important Role” brochure in English and Spanish
- Breastfeeding and Dads – Informational flyer from Maryland WIC
- Mommy Help from Pennsylvania WIC
- Project: Breastfeeding: TIME article and their Facebook page