



What partners should know about breastfeeding



Public Health
Agency

Breastfeeding – the best start

How you and your partner choose to feed your baby is a really important decision. This leaflet gives you the facts about breastfeeding and how you can support your partner if she breastfeeds.

Health benefits of breastfeeding

Research shows that breastfeeding gives your baby the best possible start, because breastmilk provides a lot more than just nourishment, it is both food and medicine.

Breastfed babies are healthier because they are less likely to suffer from:

- ear, chest and kidney infections;
- gastroenteritis (severe inflammation or infection of the stomach or gut);
- childhood obesity;
- diabetes;
- eczema and asthma.

This is due to special components in breastmilk, which boost the immune system. Breastfeeding also helps to ensure good development of your baby's eyesight, and the sucking action of the baby at the breast helps with jaw and mouth development.

Women who breastfeed reduce their risk of:

- breast cancer;
- ovarian cancer;



- osteoporosis (thinning bones);
- diabetes.

These benefits for mothers mainly come from the hormones involved in producing milk. The longer a woman breastfeeds the stronger the protection against serious diseases in later life.

** In this booklet babies are referred to as 'he'.*

Your support is important

While breastfeeding is natural, it is also a learned skill. It usually takes at least a few weeks for mother and baby to get used to breastfeeding. If these first weeks are difficult it can be tempting for the mother to stop breastfeeding.

Your support is vital to helping your partner continue to breastfeed. You can help by:

- making sure mother and baby are comfortable while feeding;
- explaining to family and friends about the importance of breastfeeding;
- bringing your partner a drink or a healthy snack to eat, such as a piece of fruit or a slice of toast;
- preparing meals and doing the housework so your partner can concentrate on feeding your baby;
- encouraging your partner, particularly when she is very tired or finding things difficult;
- protecting her from the opinions of others who may not understand the importance of breastfeeding.

Helping with your baby's feeds

After the first few weeks when breastfeeding is going well, your partner might decide to express some of her milk so that you can do an occasional feed.

Expressing milk can be done by hand or, more usually, by using a pump to collect milk from the breast and store it in a bottle. Your health visitor or community midwife will be able to give advice on this. See also www.breastfedbabies.org

It's important to remember:

- breastfeeding must be well established before a bottle is introduced as some babies can get confused or develop a preference for the bottle. This is because the sucking action required to feed from a bottle is different to that used to feed from the breast;
- maintaining a good milk supply depends on milk being removed regularly either by breastfeeding or expressing. Long periods between expressing or feeds may lower milk supply.



Facts about breastfeeding

- There are very few women who cannot breastfeed because of medical reasons. However, many women experience difficulties if the baby is not latched onto the breast properly. If this happens to your partner it could lead to sore nipples and your baby will be feeding for long periods and still not be satisfied. This can be avoided by correctly positioning your baby for feeding. The health visitor or midwife can help your partner with this.
- The more often your baby breastfeeds the more milk will be made – it works on supply and demand. Most babies will want to feed frequently, especially in the first weeks, so some feeds will seem very close together.
- You and your partner may worry that your baby is not getting enough milk because you can't measure the amount he gets. But if he is having wet and dirty nappies and is gaining weight at a normal rate, that means he's getting enough. Breastmilk provides all the nutrition your baby needs.



- In fact, as your baby gets both a drink and food from the breast, there is no need for anything else for the first six months. (WHO Global strategy for infant and young child feeding 2003)
- You and your partner may feel self-conscious about her breastfeeding in public but it can be done without anyone noticing. Your partner can lift her top from the waist and perhaps use a blanket, scarf or shawl. It can look as if your baby is just having a cuddle. Northern Ireland has many places where breastfeeding families are particularly welcome – see www.breastfedbabies.org
- Breastfeeding is sometimes used as a method of contraception. If you definitely don't want to have another baby just yet, it is best to use other more reliable methods of contraception which are suitable while breastfeeding.
- Your partner may find it helpful to meet with other breastfeeding mums. There are a number of local breastfeeding groups that meet regularly. Your health visitor and midwife will know when and where or visit www.breastfedbabies.org
- Keeping mother and baby together at night is important as it makes it easier for mum to feed baby on demand.
- Breastfeeding is handier than bottlefeeding at night and when away from home as there's no need to worry



about keeping milk fresh and heating bottles, plus it's free – bottlefeeding a baby costs £44 to £89 per month.

- Your partner will lose weight more quickly after the birth if she breastfeeds.

See www.breastfedbabies.org or the booklet *Off to a Good Start* for more information about breastfeeding, local groups and the 'Breastfeeding welcome here' scheme.

Getting involved

If your baby is breastfed you will not be able to feed him initially, but experienced partners know that there are many other ways of caring for, and being close to, your baby. Here are some suggestions that might be useful.

- Change your baby's nappy
- Settle your baby after a feed by winding him
- Hold and soothe your baby
- Play with your baby
- Place your baby on your bare chest for skin-to-skin contact
- Give your baby a massage
- Carry your baby in a sling or baby carrier
- Talk, read and sing to your baby
- Take your baby for a walk in his pram
- Bath your baby

Your relationship with your partner

Some worry that breastfeeding will affect the physical side of their relationship with their partner. Some women lose interest in sex after having a baby and for most couples it is difficult to find the time and energy to make love, but it is possible for you both to enjoy an active sex life.

- It is a good idea for your partner to feed your baby first so that she is more comfortable and your baby is settled so you are less likely to be disturbed by him crying.
- Remember that breastfeeding may make your partner's breasts feel more sensitive.
- Some men really like the changes in their partner's breasts during breastfeeding whereas others may be concerned that breastfeeding makes



breasts less attractive, but there is no evidence that any breast changes due to breastfeeding are permanent.

You and your baby

The more you get involved with caring for your baby, the more quickly you will develop a strong bond. Even if your partner is reluctant to hand over tasks, offer to help out as much as you can.

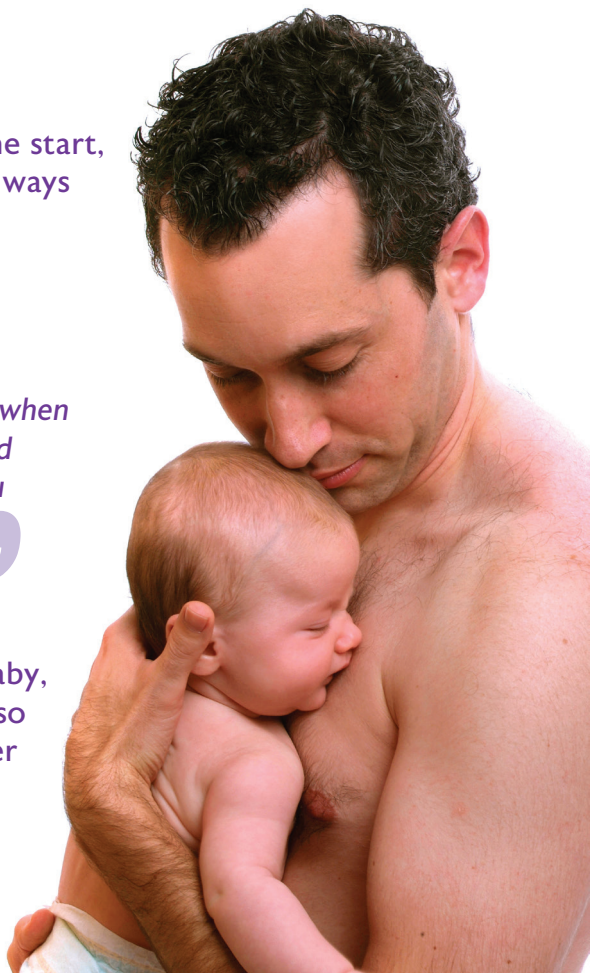
You will probably find that you are really good at settling your baby. Your baby may love the sound of your voice and the security of being held in your arms.

Supporting your partner with breastfeeding is one of the most important things you will do for your child. Try to enjoy this time – it is busy and tiring but the rewards are amazing and it won't last forever!

“I did feel a bit left out at the start, but I got involved in other ways and now I'm really good at settling him.”

“At first it was a bit awkward when other people called round and the baby wanted fed, but you can't see anything anyway.”

“I'm really proud of what Siobhan is doing for our baby, and am happy that she's also at less risk of getting cancer when she's older.”



Further information

If you want to find out more about breastfeeding, you may find these websites useful:

www.breastfedbabies.org

www.fatherhoodinstitute.org

www.laleche.org.uk

www.nct.org.uk/

If your partner is experiencing difficulties with breastfeeding, she can speak to her midwife or health visitor or contact a breastfeeding counsellor on:

La Leche League

Website: www.lalecheleagueireland.com/groups

Facebook: La Leche League Northern Ireland

National Childbirth Trust

Tel: 0300 330 0700

Breastfeeding Network Supporter Line

Tel: 0300 100 0210

National Breastfeeding Helpline

Tel: 0300 100 0212



Public Health Agency

12-22 Linenhall Street, Belfast BT2 8BS.

Tel: 0300 555 0114 (local rate).

www.publichealth.hscni.net

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