

How the nursing mother can include the father

Studies have shown that a baby's father has tremendous impact on whether, and for how long their partner nurses their child. But how does a nursing mother secure the right support from her partner?



«If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the men to collect wood, divide the work, and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea», Antoine de Saint-Exupéry once wrote. Take his advice and arouse the desire to give your baby the best nature has to offer. Turn your partner into your ally.

Every man has a different opinion about his role as a father. However, all are united in wanting nothing but the best for their child. For this reason, you should enlist your partner's support as early as possible in your breastfeeding routine.

Turn breastfeeding into a shared adventure.

Breastfeeding is a moment of incredible intimacy between a mother and her child. Enjoy it. You needn't feel bad if these moments belong to the two of you alone. However, be mindful that it can be difficult for the father if he feels left out. Turn him into your ally and make breastfeeding a shared adventure.

That adventure starts long before the baby is born. Tell him why a mother's milk is the best nutrition for your baby. Explain to him what nursing involves. Remember to talk about the difficulties, fears, hopes and expectations. The more breastfeeding becomes a project that involves you both, the more supportive he will be of you.

Tell him what you need.

Swiss paediatricians recommend breastfeeding exclusively for the first (four to) six months. A healthy infant needs only breast milk. In addition to breastfeeding, the gradual introduction of complementary foods (not before the beginning of the fifth month and no later than the beginning of the seventh month) is recommended. Maybe breastfeeding a few weeks is enough for you or you wish to nurse your child until he is a toddler. The decision about how long to breastfeed is entirely yours and your child's. But that does not mean that you cannot ask your partner for his opinion.

As soon as nursing has become an established routine (usually after around about six weeks) you can express your milk for him to feed the baby every now and then. It may even be liberating for you to break out of your tight breastfeeding schedule. Ask your breastfeeding counsellor to find out how you can keep breastfeeding despite occasionally giving your child bottled formula.

Parenthood is a shared commitment. Make him part of that responsibility. Call in his support and help. What do you expect from your partner if you have difficulties breastfeeding? Would you want him to massage your back and encourage you to continue? Should he call for professional help? Should he shop for baby formula and bottles? Clear communication helps. The best thing is if you address these questions before the problems arise. Talk about this before the baby is born. Create a list and an action plan together. Being pregnant and giving birth are mysteries to men. Help him acquiring confidence. An effective way is to watch a tutorial together (stillfoerderung.ch/kurzfilm).

Give him some alone time with the baby.

The more independent your partner's relationship with the baby is, the more free time you have to yourself. This goes both ways – nothing is more disruptive to becoming a father than a mother's doubtful, critical look.

Encourage your partner to build an independent relationship with your baby and develop his own approach to lending support. He wants to be more than a helping hand. And for this, he needs your vote of confidence and tolerance whenever he does something differently from you. More than anything else, your partner needs some alone time with the child. Once he bears the full responsibility, he will rise to the occasion.

If you want the best for your baby, be sure to offer it.



Are you a proud new dad? Then you are riding an emotional roller coaster. One moment you are enjoying total fulfilment and happiness – and in the next, you might feel overwhelmed by the situation, fenced in, or even jealous of the close bond between the mother and the child. What is the best way to deal with these feelings?



Choose your own path – invest in your relationship with your baby

Fathers have a demanding job. They are typically busy working fulltime outside the home, which on average contributes about three quarters of the family's income. However, they are expected by their partners to be present and competent fathers. This is a major challenge and quite often it can be overwhelming new fathers. Don't stress and blame yourself when you reach your limits. You are not the only one feeling this way.

When tensions and conflicting expectations arise, the goal is to shape your role as a father in a way, which is the best for you. It is important to build an independent relationship with the baby, while developing your own, personal way of being a father. One desired side effect is that the more you trust in your relationship and your skills as a father, the less bothered you will feel about critical looks from others. You will be less likely to allow outsiders to unsettle your close relationship with your partner or your child.

Let your child benefit from breastmilk – the most nutritious food nature has to offer.

Breastmilk provides the best nutrition to ensure your baby's health and a strong start in life. Studies have shown that a baby's father has tremendous impact on whether, and for how long their partner nurses their child. It is important to use that influence wisely.

Breastmilk is healthy. Nature created it to perfectly meet a newborn baby's needs. Breastmilk strengthens your child physically, and emotionally. Babies that feed on breastmilk are less likely to die of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Even if everything favours breastfeeding, it may still prove to be a challenge

for you. As a father, you will see your partner in a new role. This might trigger a range of emotions within you. It is possible that experiencing the close bond between the mother and her child makes you feel threatened and trigger feelings of envy and jealousy. You might feel as if you are a bystander and wonder where you fit it.

Those kinds of feelings are totally normal. Don't blame yourself. Feel free to experience that.

How can you support your partner while breastfeeding?

1. Find out more about breastfeeding – such as at stillfoerderung.ch/kurzfilm. Many useful tips and information are listed in the book *Neuland - Sachcomic zum Thema Stillen und Wochenbett*, available at stillfoerderung.ch/shop (in French and German only).
2. Create a cosy «nest». A calm, protective atmosphere is highly beneficial for breastfeeding. Stress and turmoil reduce the milk flow. You can start building that nest early, coordinate later visits or cosy up the breastfeeding spot with pillows.
3. Encourage your partner to breastfeed. The first days and weeks are often the most daunting of the breastfeeding period. Your assurance that your partner and baby can cope with this can be crucial.
4. Help the breastfeeding mother get enough rest and sleep. Breastfeeding consumes a lot of energy. Too little sleep may impair the production of breastmilk. This is where you come in – take your baby to your partner at night for her to breastfeed. Get up without being asked when the baby needs a nappy change.

5. During the day, take the little one for a walk to allow the mother a few hours of restful sleep. Play with the baby. Be there.
6. Many nursing mothers experience breast swelling at the beginning of the breastfeeding period. A warm flannel before breastfeeding can help to gently ease the pressure. A cold washcloth after breastfeeding may also help. It is possible that your partner needs a different kind of attention and support. Ask her and be attentive.
7. When the time has come for her to publicly nurse the baby, help her find a suitable spot (mamamap.ch). Standing or sitting next to your partner may protect her from curious eyes.
8. If you need support, you can organise professional help. When experiencing difficulties, a midwife, lactation consultant or mother-father consultant can help. Simply call and arrange for an appointment. (stillen.ch; lalecheleague.ch; hebamme.ch; sf-mvb.ch).
9. And even if your partner does not breastfeed, she will still need your support.

Finally – Take care and recharge yourself.

Contributing towards your child being nourished by the best that nature has to offer is a demanding balancing act. Support your partner and treat her respectfully. Take a step back and power down your needs a little. At the same time, take care of yourself and be just as respectful and considerate about your personal wishes.

There is a lot of talk about how difficult it can be to find the right balance between being a parent, having a job and a family. But life consists of more than just work and family. Remember your own world – your friends, your hobbies, and take time out for yourself. Only when you have found the right balance between your job, family and personal world can you talk of a genuine balance.

Create an independent relationship with your baby. Find your own way to build a bond that cannot be created with nursing. For example, you could position yourself as the number one nappy changer. Rest assured, your child wants you close and loves feeling you. Babies love the feeling of skin on skin. Place your baby wearing a nappy only on your bare torso, to convey a sense of calm and strengthen the bond between you.