



Child Health Fact Sheet

Breastfeeding Facts for Fathers

Why is breastfeeding important?

Every parent wants to give their child the very best. When it comes to feeding babies there is nothing as good as breast milk.

Breast milk is perfectly suited to the baby it's made for. If a baby is born prematurely, that mother's milk will be higher in iron than it would have been had the baby gone to full term. As each baby grows, mother's breasts produce milk which changes in volume and composition to meet the baby's changing needs.

Breast milk also provides protection. Until your baby has time to build up its own immunities, mother's immunities will be shared with him/her through her breast milk. Breastfed babies are much less likely to get gastrointestinal infections, and if they do, the infection

will not be as serious as it would have been without breast milk. Breastfed babies will also have some protection against conditions like juvenile diabetes, some childhood cancers and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

Research has confirmed that even in developed countries babies that are breastfed are much less likely to be hospitalised in their first two years of life.

Breast milk is an important factor in promoting the best possible development of babies. It is well recognised that breastfed babies have better development of their eyesight and their speech. The long chain fatty acids uniquely available in breast milk give babies a measurable advantage in intelligence.

Only a mother can breastfeed, where do fathers fit in?

Breastfeeding is as natural a part of life as pregnancy. Everyone accepts that women need a partner's support through pregnancy. This support needs to continue into breastfeeding.

Very few women are unable to breastfeed, yet many women miss out on the satisfaction of providing breast milk for their babies because they doubt their

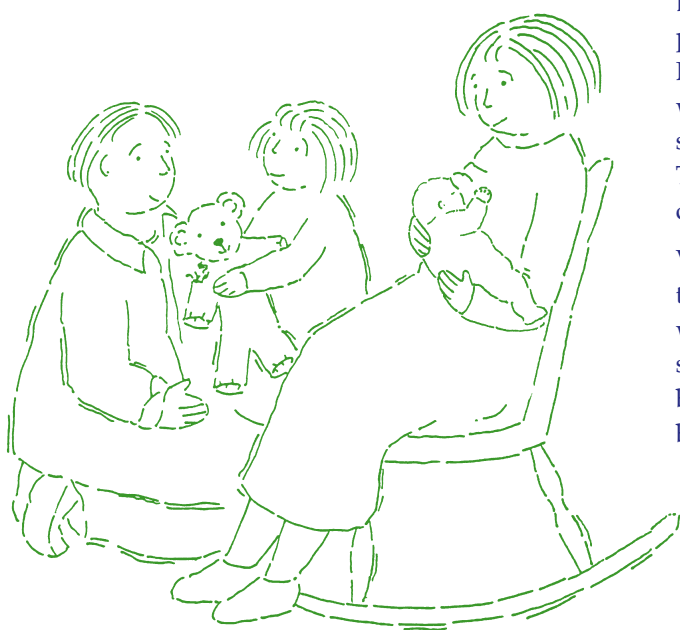
ability to succeed, and lack the support and encouragement to get them through the difficult patches.

Your belief in your partner's ability to breastfeed and your informed support can make all the difference.

Fathers can get to know their babies and support their partners by taking an active role in the practicalities of parenthood. Taking the baby for a walk, changing nappies or taking over for a while at the end of the day can give fathers an opportunity to interact with the baby. Bath time can be anytime, and many fathers find this an enjoyable way of sharing the care. Right from the beginning babies can enjoy attention. Rocking, stroking and singing can be first steps in the developing father/child relationship.

What can go wrong?

Sometimes it's just a matter of false expectations. Many new parents expect that babies will only feed and sleep. The reality is that babies cry, and their crying can last for varying amounts of time. Babies usually cry more as they get older (until six weeks of age), when they start to cry less. Crying is normal and there is no cure. Picking babies up when they cry and feeding them, cuddling or walking with them might help. Although these activities may not always calm them, it certainly won't do any harm to try.



It's hard work being with an unsettled baby, especially if you're the only adult around. Your practical assistance when you're at home in soothing, bathing, changing or washing the nappies lets your partner know that you understand how demanding and important her new job is.

Other problems which might arise, like cracked nipples, over-supply of breast milk or breast infections, can usually be fixed with the right advice at the right time.

Is it true that breastfeeding can affect your sex life?

Having a baby almost always changes your sex life, no matter how the baby is fed. Physical recovery from childbirth takes time in itself. Being a new mother is a 24-hour a day responsibility and can be exhausting. Many women combine breastfeeding with an active and enjoyable sex life, but some women do find that their interest in sex is less while they're feeding.

Don't rush it.

How long should babies be breastfed?

That's a decision mothers and babies need to make for themselves. In the first six months breast milk is the only food they need. If babies are weaned in their first year they need to move to infant formula (despite the expense and inconvenience

involved). Aiming for twelve months breastfeeding, with solids as well, in the second half of the year, makes sense.

However, many of the important protective factors in breast milk are effective with only three months exclusive breastfeeding, so some breastfeeding is definitely better than none.

Will we be stuck at home if my partner is breastfeeding?

Breastfed babies are very portable. If you enjoy activities such as sporting events or camping you can take along the breastfed baby without any worries about having to boil water, disinfect bottles or carry enough formula.

For occasions when the baby needs to be left at home, breast milk can be expressed and stored in the fridge or freezer and either the father or a baby-sitter can feed the baby.

Where can we get help if we need it?

- *Your local maternal and child health nurse.*
- *Maternal and Child Health Line – 24 hours
Telephone: (03) 9853 0844
Melbourne callers
Telephone: 1800 134 883
Country callers*
- *Breastfeeding counselling is available anytime from Nursing Mothers' on (03) 9885 0653, or in country areas from the number listed in the White Pages.*

Reading List

NMAA, Edited by Cafarella J, *Breastfeeding...Naturally.*

Renfrew M et al, Celestial Arts, *Bestfeeding.*

NMAA Booklets

Introduction to Breastfeeding.

Breast & Nipple Care.

Breastfeeding After a Caesarean.

Breastfeeding Your

Premature Baby.

References

Cunningham A S, *Breastfeeding, Bottle Feeding & Illness: An Annotated Bibliography.*

Points to remember

- **Breast milk is a complete and perfect food for babies.**
- **Breast milk protects babies against infections.**
- **Breast milk protects babies against disease.**
- **Breastfed babies have better developed intellects, eyesight and speech.**
- **Breast milk is free.**
- **Breastfeeding is environmentally friendly.**

Issued
January 2001



Breastfeeding Facts for Fathers

Child Health Fact Sheet

Prepared by the Nursing Mothers' Association of Australia.
Published by Community Care Division, Victorian Government Department of Human Services, Melbourne, Victoria.
January 2001
Also published on www.dhs.vic.gov.au/commcare
© State of Victoria 2001.
Code: CHF1012 (0730300) Not to be sold retail.