

HOW PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS CAN HELP

UPDATED MARCH 2022

THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORT PEOPLE

Partners and other loved ones can often struggle to know how to help the mother, or nursing parent. Although the breastfeeding relationship exists between the nursing pair, there are many things that partners and others can do to provide support.

It can make a big difference to a nursing parent to have a partner, family member or friend who can celebrate the little victories like achieving a comfortable latch or watching the baby drinking well. Similarly, it can mean a lot to a new mother to hear encouraging words from the baby's father or her partner or other loved ones when she is experiencing challenges. An important role for support people is to nurture the mother while she nurtures the baby.



WHY BREASTFEEDING PARENTS NEED SUPPORT

Recovering from birth takes time and in those early days and weeks it can be very helpful to have others around who can provide support while the breastfeeding parent grows in confidence and skill. Both mothers and babies have reflexes that can help guide them, but breastfeeding is also a learned skill passed from parent to parent and generation to generation. While all of this learning is taking place, breastfeeding parents usually benefit from the support of their loved ones.

HOW TO HELP YOUR PARTNER

New nursing parents will want help in different ways so it can be valuable for them to discuss with their partners how they want to be supported. Here are some ideas:

- Bringing water and snacks during breastfeeding sessions
- Saying encouraging words like, “You’re doing a wonderful job” and “Hang in there, you can do it.”
- Offering to contact a La Leche League Canada Leader or professional lactation consultant (IBCLC) for additional support. (www.lllc.ca/get-help)
- Finding ways to bring humour and fun into any difficult moments
- Holding the baby skin-to-skin and/or carrying the baby in a sling/wrap while the nursing parent takes a shower or gets a bit of fresh air
- Keeping your partner company during nursing sessions, taking the opportunity to connect with each other.
- Taking care of errands and chores: grocery shopping, meal preparation, booking appointments, laundry, cleaning, etc.
- Managing visitors: limiting the number of visitors and length of stay so that breastfeeding is not disrupted
- Reminding your partner of what is going well, and providing emotional support amidst any challenges
- Bathing the baby, changing diapers, getting the baby dressed, taking care of baby’s laundry, etc.
- Being flexible as plans change, for example, considering safe bed-sharing or having baby within arms reach by co-sleeping
- Helping older siblings adjust to life with a new baby
- Remembering that a kiss, a kind word or a cup of tea can do wonders!



BREASTFEEDING BASICS

- Human milk evolved over millennia for human babies, just as other mammals' milk evolved to feed their babies.
- Human milk is easy to digest. Baby needs to feed frequently and on cue; a minimum of 8-12 times in a 24-hour period is normal and builds a healthy milk supply.
- Between three days and six weeks, a healthy full-term baby who is getting enough milk produces 5-6 wet diapers (more if cloth) and at least 3 bowel movements the size of a \$2 coin per day.
- Breastfeeding is a perfect supply and demand system— the more breastmilk the baby drinks, the more milk the body makes. This is why supplementation with formula can reduce a mother's milk supply.
- Holding a baby skin-to-skin is good for baby's development, can improve milk supply, and can also help the father, or other parent, and baby bond.
- See *[Positioning and Latching](#)*.





OTHER WAYS TO SUPPORT BREASTFEEDING

- **Know** the basics of breastfeeding: (See Breastfeeding Basics, above) Consider taking LLLC's online Prenatal Breastfeeding course and reading reliable information online at www.lllc.ca and www.llli.org, for example, or in LLLI's *The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding*, 8th ed.



- **Support, protect and promote:** Let your partner know that you support the decision to breastfeed or chestfeed and that you believe this is normal and important through your actions and your words. If friends or family are not supportive of your feeding choices, ensure that you communicate your support and recognize her efforts so that your partner does not feel undermined and alone. Support the breastfeeding relationship for as long as the child and mother want it to last.

- **Tell hospital staff** that breastfeeding is important to your family. Find the extra supports you may need to meet your family's goals.



- **Find your local LLLC Group or online meeting** at www.lllc.ca. Peer-to-peer support has been proven to help increase breastfeeding success. Some Groups even offer Couples' meetings that non-breastfeeding partners can attend.