

Supporting a Lactating Parent

Being the parent of a new baby, and the partner of a breastfeeding mother, is a special role. Everyone's role changes when a new baby arrives, and many partners ask us what they can do. Your support is incredibly important for your partner to learn how to breastfeed and feel good about feeding your baby. You will feel better if you know WHAT to do. And, while you may think it is all about taking care of mom and baby, you also need to take care of yourself!

You and your partner BOTH need healthy food, rest, contact with close friends and family members, exercise, and a supportive environment to tackle being new parents. Because your partner is physically and emotionally recovering from giving birth and is now focused on making milk for your baby, **here are some ideas for what you can do:**

- **Keep small containers filled with healthy food available for both of you:** sandwiches or wraps, granola and yogurt, fresh fruit and veggies, protein-based snacks (like hummus or peanut butter), nuts, meats and cheeses.
- **Accept all offers** from anyone who wants to bring in a meal, or go to the grocery store for you. Do not be afraid to let them know what you do and don't like or need.
- **Fill mom's water container frequently**, whenever it gets low. Help make sure she drinks enough so never gets thirsty- this is the easiest way to know she is getting enough fluids to make breastmilk.
- **Take time off from work if at all possible.** Your partner wants and needs you around. Look into paid (or unpaid) paternity or family leave before your baby is born. It's beneficial to take at least one or two weeks off from work if you can. If you are unable to take ANY time off, please talk to your partner and determine who else can be with her while you are back at work. Ideally, this is someone who can cook, clean, run errands, help with baby care, and/or provide support and company.
- **Learn how to soothe your baby.** Any of our staff at MilkWorks can help you, or visit www.milkworks.org and read our *Tips for Caregivers* and *Soothing Your Baby* information in our Breastfeeding Information Center. Babies love a warm body (remember where they spent the last nine months!). Your heart beat and breathing will comfort your baby. Try putting your baby skin to skin on your chest after feedings, and learn how to wear your baby properly in a baby carrier.
- **Help with diaper changes.** It is easier to learn to be comfortable with this when your baby is little and not so wiggly.
- **Offer to give the baby their bath.** This can be a great bonding experience, and gives mom a break.



- **If your baby is sleepy while breastfeeding**, gently tickle your baby's feet. This may help your baby feed longer.
- **If mom is pumping, ask what you can do to help.** Cleaning and/or assembling pump parts, or supplementing your baby will save time.
- **Monitor who is coming to visit**, and keep people/family away in the early days unless mom wants them around for help. New mothers can feel very overwhelmed and visitors can disrupt nursing and expose all of you to more illnesses. Do not be afraid to protect your new family!
- **Nurture your partner!** New moms need to feel like they are not alone in this. Spend time with your partner. Go to appointments with her. Be positive and supportive about breastfeeding. If she is struggling with breastfeeding, help her make an appointment at MilkWorks and come to the appointment with her. Tell her she is doing a good job, and don't forget to thank her!
- **It's very normal for new moms to get the baby blues, and become emotional at times.** Encourage her to identify a close female friend or family member she can talk to about being a new mom, or attend a mom's group at MilkWorks. The strong emotions that many mothers have (she may be weepy for the first time in her life) usually pass within a few weeks. If her mood does not change, or you notice she does not want to care for herself or your baby, let her know that you are making an appointment with her Primary Care provider or OBGYN. If either of you feel that you are dealing with postpartum depression or anxiety, MilkWorks has a list of therapists, counselors, moms' support groups and other community resources to help.
- www.padrecadre.com is a website just for Dads. It has a blog, forums and many ideas for Dads to connect with other Dads. We all learn from each other and Dads can be a tremendous source of information and support for other Dads.

What should you NOT do?

- **Don't offer to feed your baby a bottle unless you have both discussed your baby's needs and have agreed it is the best for your baby.** If you are going to feed baby, make sure you know how to supplement with a bottle.
- **Instead of saying "I don't think our baby is getting enough" or "Are you sure you have enough milk for our baby?"**, encourage your partner to continue breastfeeding while you seek help from a lactation consultant. Working with an IBCLC will help to increase her knowledge and confidence, as well as yours!
- **Don't bring up parenting opinions from other family members.** This will undoubtedly shake her confidence and may cause conflict between you.
- **While you may be tempted to "bury it" if things are not going well, DON'T!** Instead, reach out to your health care providers, including MilkWorks, for support and information. We can help problem-solve and identify resources. All parents (and babies) benefit from a village of support!

Reviewed: January 2023