



Fathers, Breastfeeding & Bonding

By Dr. Lucas Godinez, MD, IBCLC

At the special moment a baby is born a lot of changes occur instantly. For the father, new relationships and responsibilities begin. They transform from being a husband and “expectant” father to the husband and “new” father. Their role in the family dynamic becomes structured with guidance, strength, teaching, leadership, support and encouragement. They must nourish and love more than one person and divide their time into multiple unpredictable circumstances. As a father of three children myself, fatherhood is the most wonderful, frustrating, exciting education to embrace.

One of the first important decisions to make as a father and mother is to choose the nutrition for your baby. Breastfeeding is the best natural way to feed an infant to help them grow. This essential nourishment also causes change for the father. It “continues the exclusive relationship the mother and infant experienced during pregnancy” as stated by Pamela Jordan (She is a researcher and associate professor in Department of Family and Child Nursing at the University of Washington.) However, a father may feel inadequate because he cannot provide his own nutrition and does not know how to even assist with feedings. The baby’s nutritional needs can begin to physically interfere with a father’s intimate desire with the mother. What fathers need to learn is how to support breastfeeding and to develop their special bond with the child. As Anne Altshuler (RN, MS, IBCLC, LLL Leader) states “a father is the first person to teach his baby that love doesn’t have to come with food.”

Ways to be there for mother and baby:

- Love and nourish your baby’s mother. Mother’s physical wellbeing will help her milk production and longevity of breastfeeding. Listen intently and offer encouragement when necessary. Be patient if the mother is less interested in intimacy after the baby is born. Hormones, tiredness, anxiety can lessen their physical desires.
- Take over mother’s chores and responsibilities when she cannot perform them and be there to help out whenever you can.
- Help the mother with breastfeeding – your eyes can make sure the infant is latching appropriately at the breast (I tell dads to look for the fish lips of the infant) and you can help position the baby for the mother. Often times, you can get an extra pillow to make it just right.
- Talk and sing to your baby. A baby can recognize your voice at birth and hearing is one of their most precious senses in infancy. Take the opportunity to read or tell stories.
- Hold your baby any moment you can and providing skin-to-skin contact will enhance other senses – touch and smell. Baby carriers or slings can free up your hands to do other things and allow the baby to experience what dad is doing. Holding the baby to sleep/nap allows them to feel your heartbeat and the rhythm can be mesmerizing/soothing.
- Bathe your baby and get a little wet yourself.

- Change diapers. Diaper duty begins in the hospital with the first meconium poops the baby makes. Make it a fun experience – opportunity to talk and laugh face to face with the baby, challenge/perfect your techniques and efficiency with changing a diaper, learn about/appreciate smells (sometimes challenging how long you can hold your breath to avoid the smell).
- Become the go-to-person for the other children in the family – they need time to adjust to a new baby and its distractions for the mother. Your relationship with your other children can become stronger and deeper with this opportunity.

Enjoy being a father and embrace the new roles with it. The more supportive you are of mother and baby the longer breastfeeding will be and the more confident the mother will feel about their ability to do so.

Dr. Lucas Godinez graduated from the University of Dallas and went on to complete his medical degree at the Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine. He completed his Pediatric residency at the Mercy Hospital of Pittsburgh and immediately joined Kids Plus Pediatrics in July 2004. He is board certified in Pediatrics and is also an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant. He is a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Osteopathic Association. His special interests in medicine include breastfeeding medicine, preventative pediatric medicine, sports related injury including concussions, and osteopathic manipulative treatments. When not at work, he enjoys fishing, gardening, biking, and carpentry, but most of all he enjoys “being a kid” with his three children.

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