



HAPPY FATHERS DAY:

Role fathers play in raising their children by supporting breastfeeding

As Father's Day approaches, it is important to celebrate the role fathers play in the lives of their children. IBFAN Africa would like to join the rest of the world and wish all fathers a Happy Fathers Day. However, as breastfeeding advocates, we would like to highlight the important role that fathers can play in supporting their partners to optimally feed their infants thus bringing on positive lifelong effects on the health of both baby and mother.

The father of a breastfed baby will reap the benefits of a healthier partner and healthier infant. Traditionally, fathers view themselves as providers and protectors of their families. Naturally, a father wants to assure the welfare of his partner and his baby. His support, encouragement, and direct help can be the decisive factor in a woman's breastfeeding success. When his infant is breastfed, a father experiences pride and confidence, knowing he has contributed to the healthiest outcome for his baby and his partner. Fewer infant illnesses mean less disruption of family life and less expense, while the long-term health benefits to his partner can have a powerful impact on their quality of life: various studies have looked at the possible health benefits to women who have breastfed. There is now good evidence that, on average, the following health problems are less common in women who have breastfed one or more babies compared to those who have never breastfed: Breast cancer, Ovarian cancer, Type 2 diabetes and Postnatal depression.

Despite contemporary changes in traditional sex role stereotypes, most fathers still bear greater responsibility for family financial commitments. With all the additional costs of caring for a new baby, they appreciate not having to spend money on infant formula. Some fathers have calculated the projected savings (approximately US\$600.00) that breastfeeding will achieve and then suggested ways to use the unspent money on other important needs of the family.

Since breastfeeding is done by the mother, the dad can feel left out; however that should not be the case because there are many other ways for fathers to be supportive and bond with their babies. Dad can take baby for walks, burp, bath, put baby to sleep, massage or read to the baby. He can also take time off work and provide crucial care for his partner in the early weeks while she recovers from the birth. A mother can also express some breast milk which he can feed himself the baby using a cup.

This is best done when breastfeeding is established. When solids start, the father can also take part in feeding of the baby's first meals.

Fathers can further be supportive to the mother by being positive and encouraging. This can be achieved by:

- Boosting your partner's confidence - reassurance and praise will help her to keep going;
- Listening and talking honestly about your feelings;
- Being involved with the baby so that the caring is shared;
- Helping with household chores;
- Encouraging your partner to eat and drink regularly, so that she is able to cope - try feeding mum while she feeds baby; and
- Getting support or specialist help in case of breastfeeding problems.

"Fathers appreciate the convenience of being able to pick up and go somewhere without having to pack anything extra for baby. Breast milk is always ready to feed, at the right temperature, and in a clean, attractive container". Cynthia Garrison