

WHAT ABOUT DAD?

*For as long as there have been babies, there have been fathers. But no father in the history of the world ever nursed a baby. If fatherhood doesn't mean feeding, what does it mean? **Everything else!***

Fathers are different from mothers. They have fuzzy chests, deep voices, big hands, flat shoulders - differences that babies come to appreciate. "Ma-ma." "Na-na." Those are quiet, needy sounds - calls for the softness and milk that soothe away hunger and fretfulness. In fact, "Mama" was probably Latin baby-talk for breast. "Pa-pa!" and "Da-da!" are cheerful, playful sounds made by babies around the world. At the end of the day, when Mama and Baby are frazzled, Daddy may be just the different smell and feel and voice and style they both need.

Wear your baby in a sling and go for a walk. Babies are social people, and usually love to be "moving and grooving" at eye level in public. Read the newspaper to your baby, or take a nap with him on your bare chest. Talk to him about things around the house; the low pitch of your voice is intriguing. After the first few weeks, get in the bathtub together. As he learns that he can always touch base with Mom for a snack, he'll be more and more relaxed with you. Tuck your baby in bed with both of you for cozy, easy nights and a strong sense of family.

The "colic dance" is a father specialty. Hold your fussy baby by putting your hand in his crotch and his front along your forearm, so that his head rests near your elbow with one of his arms on each side of your arm, your hand holding his thigh. Almost all babies relax in this "magic hold", especially if you jiggle gently as you move. Or sway with your baby. Babies tend to prefer side-to-side motion over front-to-back motion, whether on a shoulder or in a car seat.

Make diaper time a social time. After the first few weeks, diaper changes are usually a favorite time for games and conversation. And breastmilk diapers smell fine: popcorn, or buttermilk, or maybe cheddar cheese.

Nursing and Mama are the center of a new baby's world. Nursing is his career, his hobby, his obsession. But his world keeps getting bigger, and the first person your baby will add to his world is you. You are The Safe Person Who Is Not Mama, and your very different style will gradually teach your baby that different can be nice, too. In the meantime...

A father's first job is to *support* the uniquely female process of breastfeeding, not to *compete* with it, and how long your partner nurses depends more on you than on any other person. More than one non-latching baby has begun nursing because Dad gave just the right encouragement at just the right moment! Offering a "relief bottle" may seem helpful, but in the early weeks it is more likely to cause additional problems: soreness, breast refusal, extra work, and - if the bottle contains formula - health risks. Instead, be your partner's bulwark against criticism. See that she gets fed. Help her find informed and positive help (www.lalecheleague.org and www.ilca.org are good places to start). Care for her so that she can care for your child. Your two separate jobs will link to form a strong, secure safety net for the World's Best Baby.