

Father To Father - On Breastfeeding

By: David Stewart, AAHCC, PhD, NAPSAC

So your wife wants to breastfeed. You're lucky. You'll never have to get up for midnight bottles. You'll be able to travel with your wife and baby without inhibition, even go camping if you want. Baby's food will always be there in exactly the right amount, formula, time and temperature. It's also cheaper. With the money you'll save, you could buy a major appliance every six months. Your baby will smell better. No spitting up indigestible cow's curd, and bowel movements will be less stinky. There is also research to show that your baby will have a better chance to be healthy and will probably have fewer allergies. This means savings to you on doctor bills. And mother's breast is the ideal mold for the growth of straight, strong teeth, which means fewer costly orthodontal bills later for you.

Human milk is the perfect food for development of human babies. The milk of each type of mammal is species-specific for the needs of that particular mammal. Take seal milk, for example. The first struggle of a newborn seal is to stay warm. What it needs is rich, creamy, fat-producing milk, and that is exactly what nature provides. Seal milk is one of the richest milks known. As another example, consider rabbits. The greatest concern of a baby rabbit is to avoid being eaten up. Since a rabbit's only defense, when discovered, is to run, a baby rabbit's greatest need is to grow up fast so it can run like its parents. What it needs is a high-protein milk, so nature has made rabbit milk with almost ten times the protein of human milk. Now take cows. The biggest problem of a newborn calf is to stand up. It needs muscle. And cow's milk is ideal for developing muscle tissue. In the case of humans, we are mental beings. Our survival and success depend on brain power. Human milk is ideal for the development of nerves and grey matter.

In addition to these advantages, your wife's bosom will never be lovelier than when she is breastfeeding. In India the milk-laden breast is considered to be so lovely that in most of their art the women are shown engorged. Total breastfeeding can also aid in spacing children.

These are all earthy, concrete reasons why your wife should nurse your baby. But the most important reason why you should support her in this is the simple fact that she wants to do it. Her desire stems from natural maternal feelings. She will find a great amount of fulfillment and satisfaction in breastfeeding her baby. And, as she herself is fulfilled, her love will grow and flow out to you more than ever before. That is why your support is so necessary. If forced to make a choice between her husband's wishes that she not breastfeed and her womanly desire to do so, she cannot feel happy with either decision. The outcome will be that either choice will adversely affect her relationship and attitude toward you. But if you are supportive, you will find that not only your wife but you, too, will derive a great deal of satisfaction as she breastfeeds your baby.

FROM HUSBAND TO FATHER

If you appreciate the multitude of advantages to mother, infant, and yourself and you have made the decision to support your wife in breastfeeding, you must recognize your new position as father relative to mother and child. The adjustment from bachelor to husband is not nearly so great as the adjustment from husband to father.

In the beginning the child's sole source of sustenance is mother. A baby is totally helpless and dependent. Although your wife may have devoted a great deal of time to you before the baby, she cannot devote as much time now and still meet baby's needs. Something has to give—either you or the baby. Mother can only do so much. Hopefully, you can be the mature one and give up as much of your wife's attention to the child as the child needs, recognizing that the child is totally immature and cannot, at this stage, give anything. Realize that your wife loves you as much as ever and will love you even more for your unselfishness at this time.

Most men feel some degree of jealousy of the attention given the child by their wives. Some of this jealousy probably reflects unfulfilled emotional needs of their own childhoods, which hamper their own growth in maturity. Recognizing this feeling and its probable source may have a favorable effect on your attitudes and actions.

You can, for example, make the intellectual decision not to always give in to the desire to urge your wife to spend less time with the child ("let him cry a while", "let's get a babysitter and go out," etc.). Instead, remind yourself that the needs of the baby, though demanding, are temporary, but the consequences of neglecting them may be permanent. If you and your wife meet the young infant's needs fully, you will have materially contributed to his maturity and happiness throughout the rest of his life. At the same time, you will probably experience a growth in your own maturity, and along with this a lessening of the feelings of jealousy and neglect. The trick is to concentrate on the child, accepting the drastic changes that a newborn brings into a couple's lifestyle.

And now a word on immaculate housekeeping and gourmet meals. You need to recognize that it's difficult if not impossible for your wife to meet the physical and emotional needs of you and your children, always keep a neat house, and prepare elaborate meals at the same time. Insist on an immaculate house and you may have neglected kids, if not a neglected husband as well. Something's got to give. Keep in mind the principle that the house and everything in it was made for the family, not the family for the house. Consider the purchase of additional conveniences and lend her a helping hand whenever you can. Every minute your wife can save from housework is a minute she can give to you and the children.

AS THE FAMILY GROWS

Father can serve as a very good bridge for children between mother and the world. Let me explain. The new baby is very dependent on mother, becoming quite attached to her. This seems to be the beginning of a "step-at-a-time" process to good social behavior. First the baby establishes a solid relationship with mother, and from that secure base he learns to know daddy and sibling. Sometimes this first step in baby's journey toward maturity is not understood by the father to be a step forward and it makes him feel bad if the baby seems to prefer mother. However, if you have been around the baby a lot and if he is allowed to develop at his own pace, there will gradually come a time (say at approximately two years) when he will start wanting to break his attachment to mother and choose to be with you. This will be another step in his social development-development of a relationship with father. From this expanded base, the child will soon want to be more with brother and sister or other children and friends. By the time he starts school he is able to handle the enormous social situation into which he is thrown at that time. You will see that if your child is not forced according to parents' wishes or social expediency, but allowed to grow gradually in his own way and at his own pace, he will develop a maturity, even in his youth, that you will be proud of.

When a new arrival joins the family, just as you, the father, have to recognize your new position relative to mother and nursing infant, so must older siblings be helped to recognize theirs. But don't expect them to make the transition in the same adult manner as you. If it takes effort for you, it will take more effort for them, and they will need your help. It is particularly at this time that a father can strengthen his relationship with the older children.

You are well aware of the helpless and total dependence of the newborn on his mother. The siblings must now also learn that relative to the newborn they are considerably more independent and mature. You must start emphasizing this long before the baby arrives. If you have a toddler, start talking about how big he is. Get him used to the idea of being big and help him to like this idea.

Although mother has spent much time with the older children before, now she cannot spend as much. Her time must be divided, and first priority has to be given the newborn, just as she gave first priority to each of the older children when they were first born. Emphasize your toddler's accomplishments as opposed to the baby's helplessness. And remember that your wife must make time for the toddler too, even if it means not cleaning up the house or making the favorite pie.

Also, expect the toddler to want to do the things baby does. He learns by imitating, and he will imitate the baby as well as mom, dad, and other children. This behavior does not necessarily mean that he is regressing. It may only mean that he wants to see what it is like to suck his thumb or be in that small crib. Be lenient and loving, never critical. Be more concerned about your long-time goals for your child than about what your friends may think.

Since mother has to divide herself, the father can fill in as mother from time to time-with caressing to continue the flow of love, with comforting when upset, and with kissing of skins and bruises to

make them well. Don't be ashamed to show such affection. It is a sign of strength to be both masculine and gentle.

It is especially important for you to be patient and kind with the children when mother has a new baby. She is likely to be tired and frustrated by not getting her work done as usual and may be a bit cross and impatient with the other children at this time. This is the time they really need daddy. Hold and love them a lot. And be patient if they show regressively childish behavior at this time. They are still children, so why shouldn't they act childishly? Consider taking some "new father" leave from your job, if you can.

Fatherhood is the ultimate of manhood. Being a father is the one thing that only a man can do. Take pride in it and apologize to no one for giving your time and first consideration to your family, sometimes putting your job second.

Your wife could no longer give you her undivided attention upon the birth of your first. With more than one she will temporarily have even less time for you. To be with her at this time you must concentrate on what she is concentrating on - the children. You will find that if you hold and love your children a lot, you'll not miss your wife's undivided attention. In fact, you'll find her in this way, and she will love you all the more for it.

And keep in mind that all this concentrating on the baby now and giving so much of your time and yourself will be seen in retrospect as a very short period in your whole life span. Neglecting your infant now can well be false economy of time. Shortcuts for your convenience in your child's early years can lead to greater amount of time lost to heartaches and disappointments in your child's later years. Realize that spending time with your children now is for your own best good, too. The investment of minutes today can yield the most satisfying compound interest through a lifetime. Your time of giving is so short compared to the time you will have to enjoy the fruits of your unselfishness.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Without my wife's example, encouragement and help through the years, I would not know how to be a father, and writing an article such as this would have been quite impossible. Most of what I have learned about good fathering I have learned through my wife. It is my opinion that men, in general will not automatically know how to be a good father and must rely on the assistance of their wives who, if left free to follow their natural maternal feelings, will usually know what is best. So listen to your wife's feelings concerning family life and don't require instant reasons or facts to justify everything she feels. The logic is there and, in due time, you will begin feeling and seeing it too. For myself, having respected my wife's wishes in childrearing, I have found that she has led me down a path of ever increasing happiness. For this I shall remain always grateful.