

Can I still be intimate with my partner while they are breastfeeding?

Yes, breastfeeding doesn't prevent intimacy. Some couples find this is a time when they feel especially close and sex continues naturally – although sleep deprivation may cause difficulties. It just depends on when you both agree it is right. You may find that someone who has given birth and is breastfeeding feels differently about their body and how they want to be touched. Other couples may take a little longer to get back in the groove. This is completely normal. Be tender, affectionate and empathic. Talk about how you're feeling but understand that this baby phase really doesn't last long.

If the breastfeeding partner is exclusively breastfeeding day and night, there is considerable contraceptive protection. Although you should not rely on this method if intervals between feeds get longer, if your partner's menstrual cycle returns, or as your baby approaches six months. A breastfeeding counsellor can tell you more about the conditions needed for breastfeeding to give reliable contraceptive protection.

Research shows that a supportive partner is crucial in successful breastfeeding. Don't underestimate your own importance. There may be times when you need extra support. Partners are welcome to phone the helplines too. Don't feel you have to know all the answers.

Our short online *Team Baby* course will help you understand what your breastfeeding partner is going through and you can both do the course together. Easily accessible from your phone or your laptop. £5.99. See abm.me.uk for details.

My partner is in some pain while breastfeeding – is this normal?

It's not unusual for breastfeeding to be uncomfortable at the start. However, if your partner is experiencing a lot of pain and discomfort, encourage them to seek help from someone trained in breastfeeding support. The nipple should come out of the baby's mouth rounded at the end, without looking squashed or pointed. And the nipple shouldn't be cracked or damaged. There are different causes of pain. You might find a local breastfeeding support group or ask your health visitor or midwife what support is available.

When someone has just given birth, they may be feeling especially vulnerable and emotional. You may be the one with more energy to seek out the support your partner needs.

You can call the National Breastfeeding Helpline on 0300 100 0212 (9.30am- 9.30pm).

Can I breastfeed too?

If you have breasts and it is your partner who has given birth, it's possible to induce lactation and share breastfeeding, even if you have never had a baby. You can contact a lactation consultant to get further information on this.

Association of Breastfeeding Mothers

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Partners and breastfeeding



helpline: 0300 100 0212

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Congratulations on your new baby!

Breastfeeding is the natural way to feed a baby. Breastfed babies are likely to be healthier throughout their lives than if they were formula fed because they are protected against a wide range of illnesses and infections.

There are also positive health outcomes for your breastfeeding partner, such as a lower risk of ovarian and breast cancers and osteoporosis and a lower risk of mental health issues. And, of course, breastfeeding costs less, and breast milk is easily portable.

Breastfeeding: the basics

Breastfeeding works best when we respond to our baby rather than trying to follow a schedule or trying to artificially space out feeds. Experts now recommend we follow what the baby shows us they need. The more a baby feeds, the more milk the breastfeeding parent will make, so it is best to offer the breast whenever baby shows signs of being hungry. Breastfeeding is not just about milk. It's how babies can be calmed, soothed and warmed which helps with their growth, brain development and building relationships.

A newborn baby has a stomach about the size of a cherry so its capacity to hold milk is small. Human milk is digested efficiently, and new babies may want to feed again after two hours and sometimes even sooner.

There may be a time in the day where the baby appears to want to feed continuously for a few hours. This is called '**cluster feeding**' and can be a challenging time. It can often happen in the evening. You and your partner may wonder if baby is getting enough milk or if there is something wrong, but it helps to know that it is a normal part of a young baby's feeding pattern.

Babies may also feed more frequently for a couple of days to send signals to increase milk production. This is sometimes called a '**growth spurt**'. Receiving messages from your baby is how milk supply develops and changes to meet your baby's needs. Your baby's nappies and weight gain will tell you how much milk your baby is getting.

How can I bond with my baby too?

Breastfeeding promotes a strong bond between the breastfeeding parent and the baby, and some non-breastfeeding partners worry that they might miss out. However, there are lots of ways that parents can get to know their baby.

Breastfeeding releases oxytocin - the love hormone - in both parent and the baby, which helps to bond them. It's the same hormone which is released when you kiss, hold hands or hug your partner. You can also get that oxytocin release when you hold your baby close.

Letting your undressed baby lie against your bare chest (which you will hear called skin-to-skin) helps regulate the baby's heartbeat and body temperature. You could bathe with your baby in the family bath or walk with the baby in a sling. While you're rocking, pacing and singing, your partner gets a rest and baby feels reassured and safe with you.

Many people say that allowing a non-breastfeeding partner to bottlefeed the baby helps with bonding but there is no evidence to show this is the case. Some couples do choose to express breastmilk so that the other parent can feed baby. However, if this is something you want to try, it's best to wait until breastfeeding is well established (after the first few weeks) because if a baby uses a bottle too early, this can affect their ability to breastfeed properly. Expressing and gaps in removing milk from the breasts can interfere with the milk supply or risk breast problems. *For a breastfed baby, a cuddle is likely to be a more relaxing experience than being given a bottle.*

How can I support my partner?

Know your stuff. Let your partner know that breastfeeding is worth it, that your partner is doing great and you are supportive.

Antenatal education is important for both of you. It's useful if you know about breastfeeding and how milk supply works. Non-breastfeeding partners are often better able to observe the baby latching on and to get a 360-degree view. If you've prepared during your partner's pregnancy, you really can make all the difference.

Looking after a baby can be very tiring and stressful, especially at first. Breastfeeding parents often put their baby's needs before their own, so you can support your partner by ensuring there's enough for them to eat and drink, and that your partner rests as much as possible. Ensure there are healthy, filling foods available to grab.

Some parents initially feel self-conscious about breastfeeding in public. Your partner may welcome your support in getting out and about, especially at first. Your family and friends may not be as well informed about breastfeeding as you, or they may not know what normal breastfed baby behaviour is. You may be the one who has to speak to people, signpost them to helpful information and surround your partner with care and support.

Lots of visitors in the early days may impact on breastfeeding. It may be down to you to act as gatekeeper and to ensure that any visitors are making the dinner and sorting the washing rather than expecting cups of tea or making unhelpful comments.