



Top 10 ways for partners to help

Excerpts used with permission from 'The positive breastfeeding book' by Amy Brown.

Partners shouldn't underestimate how helpful they can be just by being supportive of breastfeeding.

Clare Phillips

A prestigious research study of how partners can help their breastfeeding partner (ok, a survey I did one afternoon on Facebook) revealed the following top 10 ways in which partners can help.

1. Feed the mother

This might mean literally cutting up and putting the food in her mouth for her as she feeds the baby. It might mean cooking meals that can be eaten one-handed. Or it might mean leaving healthy (and let's face it, not so healthy) snacks in the fridge for her that she can eat during the day without having to prepare them, again ideally one-handed.

Partners, it can be hard to help, especially when things get emotional on top of little sleep. One thing that can help is prepping easy food to eat with one hand. Cut-up steak, Mac cheese made with protein pasta, favourite finger food, and decent wide straws for soup! - Daniel Barbato, dad of two

2. Do the housework

No brainer. She will spend what seems like 25 hours a day feeding the baby. Let her have a break from everything else.

He may have got into sleep deprivation competitiveness with me, but I forgave him at the sight of him keeping everything going around me while I was pinned to the sofa! - Anon

3. Be her advocate with health professionals.

Ask the questions she is just too shattered to ask, or feels suddenly too emotionally vulnerable to ask. Research the questions you have.

I don't know what birth did to me but it turned me from confident, outspoken career boss girl into an emotional wreck for a few weeks. Suddenly I felt incapable of challenging things I knew weren't right, even though old me was looking at me with a face of horror and disgust. My partner was so good here.

She would calmly but factually ask questions and correct the one midwife we had who didn't seem to have updated her knowledge since training in the 1960s. It was such a help and I'm sure she got me appointments and better professional opinions I wouldn't have got in that state on my own.

- Anon

4. Hold the baby between feeds

Watch out for feeding cues and pass her the baby straight away. Take the baby for a short walk if she wants.

My husband held little one in a sling and told me whenever he felt a shuffle or saw anything that could be a feeding cue. Important when you have a very sleepy baby! - Carmen Pagor. IBCLC, mum of two

5. If she's immobile or sore after the birth, get up and pick the baby up for her and put them back

after so she doesn't have to lift the baby or move. This is a particularly good tip in the days following a c-section.

After a difficult birth I couldn't reach to the side of the bed to get the baby out of the Moses basket. Husband would get out of bed, walk around and pass her to me. When I finished feeding he'd get out and put her back - this was every hour or two for a good few weeks! He also brought me a glass of water every time I started feeding without me asking and never suggested a bottle even though I really struggled for the first few months with my first. - Verity Di Francesco, mum of two

6. Fend off too many visits from friends and family.

It is ok to be the visit police. Some mums love nothing more than loads of friends, family, neighbours and the lady from the local shop popping in as soon as they are back from hospital. Great. You can organise making sure they aren't all demanding to hold the baby while your partner ends up making endless rounds of tea. But if she doesn't? It's ok to tell people to come back in a week/month/next lifetime. Or to just stay for 20 minutes. Kind caring human beings will understand.

My partner asked who I really wanted to see and who I would rather not. He even made himself a

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spreadsheet at one point. He was on duty answering the phone and door and did a sterling job of letting people in, getting them to help, and more importantly, getting them back out once they'd overstayed their welcome! - Anon

7. Hold her

There will be bad times - days, or maybe even weeks - when she will look at you and sob that she can't do it any more (usually while continuing to do it). Never underestimate the power of a hug.

I remember 'night 3 in the newborn house' (first baby), hubby holding baby in one arm, me in the other, both of us crying. He just said 'I don't know what to do so I will hug you both. Then he remembered the leaflet and we went through it step by step. - Elanor Jemison

8. Be on her side

Know that she wants to breastfeed, so be her breastfeeding champion and help her do this. This might mean talking to other people about their comments and why breastfeeding is important to you as a family. It might be giving her some encouragement if she wavers. If definitely means not criticising her choices and doing what you can to be supportive, even when it looks like a challenge.

He never once said why don't you stop this?' (Our baby didn't latch for several weeks so I was expressing) or 'Let's get some formula: Instead he quietly and confidently got on with supporting me by washing pump parts and telling me how amazing it was that baby could still get my milk even though he wouldn't feed at my breast. One night I said I wanted him to go and get formula. He said 'Sure. If you still want it in the morning we'll go together and get some'. Funnily enough, by the morning I had changed my mind. - Lucy; breastfeeding counsellor and mum

9. Help her practically with tasks such as expressing

Sterilising a pump, storing breastmilk etc if needed. Sometimes breastfeeding isn't straightforward and there are things to be done. Help out where you can.

She put herself on pump washing and sterilising duty. The last thing you want is to wash all the bits after pumping. Little things make a huge difference. - Tamsyn

10. Be proud of her.

Boost her confidence. Tell her she's doing an amazing job. Just like the hug, never underestimate the power of hearing that your partner loves you, thinks you're great and is really proud of the tricky new thing you are doing. This can turn an exhausting never-ending night into a good one.

He just told me I was an amazing mum when things were tough. - Anna Stepp-Rumble

Overall? She is there to feed the baby and feeding isn't just about milk, it's about love and care. Your job is to feed her, so that she can do that. And feeding isn't just about making meals, it's about love and care. See what I did there? But it's true.