

Dads and Doulas: Support During the Postpartum Period

The birth of each baby has a long lasting impact on the physical and mental health of the mother, baby and family. The way in which the woman, baby, partner and family transition into a new unit have a long-term impact on their physical and emotional health.

In traditional societies, women and men grow up around birth, breastfeeding, infants and children. After giving birth, women are surrounded by caring family members who have a great deal of experience and wisdom to offer. This kind of help is rarely available to new parents internationally. The doula's support is intended to fill the gaps left by our postpartum traditions, which usually include only medical procedures, occasional checkups and the purchase of baby related paraphernalia. The doula's education, quiet support and guidance are a manifestation of the traditional postpartum support that our culture is missing.

There are many ways in which the doula's support benefits the father. Research has proven that mothers and babies have an easier transition with support. However, fathers, experiencing great life transitions of their own, may not be able to be the primary provider of this support. Fathers are redefining their roles; they may also be adjusting to sleep deprivation, financial pressure and other stressors, as well. The doula's support is for the father as much as the mother or children. A sympathetic ear, source of encouragement, gentle educator and friend is something from which we could all benefit throughout our lives. The postpartum doula provides all of these during this defining life experience.

The doula can also help the father to learn the art of "mothering the mother", increasing chances for success in areas such as breastfeeding and reduction of postpartum depression. Rather than being told to "help out", partners and other family members benefit from concrete instruction and role-modeling on how to support a woman during the weeks after delivery.

The importance of the father's involvement and support during the weeks following birth cannot be overstated. During this time he truly becomes a parent, getting to know this tiny yet complete person who has entered his family. The doula can ease this introduction, helping the father to discover all he can about his baby, as well as developing his own concept of himself as a parent. In addition, the doula's support can help parents to adjust their own relationship, moving forward to enhance their previous life together as a couple who are now parents.

The role of the doula is to help the family experience success. She does this with quiet, reassuring support for all family members. By dedicating herself to the family in this way, the doula validates and enhances the parents' intuitive ability to nurture and



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encourages them to become confident to develop and implement their own parenting style.

No one can say it better than a Dad who used a postpartum doula's services...

"With our daughter now three weeks old, it is easy for me to look back and realize how critical our postpartum doula's help was in helping me adjust to our new addition. Our doula helped my wife with breastfeeding, cooked meals for us and also showed us how to massage and wash our baby. I had no previous experience with babies, so all the tips and pointers she gave me really helped out. I at least felt like I had some hope in dealing with a crying baby at three in the morning. She also helped with some of the housework, so I had more time to spend with my daughter. When my parents came to visit, our doula watched our baby and also prepared dinner for us while I ran errands and my wife got their room ready. In short, she not only made my life, easier, but by helping me, made the quality of my daughter's life all the better."

For more information about finding a doula in your area or how to become a doula, contact:

**DONA International
PO Box 626
Jasper IN 47546**

**Phone: (888)788-3662
Email: Doula@DONA.org**



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