

## Dads' role in breastfeeding

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**BREASTFEEDING** provides important nutrients for infant growth and development – and fathers play a crucial role in the journey, according to a Deakin University researcher.



Dr Kidane Gebremariam, from Deakin's Institute for Physical Activity and Nutrition (IPAN), is investigating how to better engage fathers in supporting their partners to breastfeed.

“Among the factors affecting breastfeeding, fathers' beliefs on whether their partner should breastfeed strongly influences the level of maternal intention to breastfeed,” he said.

Geelong dad Ryan McKinnis admitted he didn't know much about breastfeeding before he became a father, but said there was a lot to learn, including latching, burping, colic, mastitis and expressing milk.

“Anything dads can learn about breastfeeding in the lead-up to becoming a parent or in those first few months is really useful,” he said.

Now father to a toddler and newborn, Mr McKinnis said the best help he could give his partner Jen was the time and space she needed to breastfeed their baby.

“I'll entertain our toddler, do jobs around the house and grab Jen a drink or snack if she wants one,” he said.

“I also bottle feed with expressed milk if Jen is out. Having the flexibility to breast or bottle feed has been really useful and means that I'm able to take on a bigger role.”

In his research, Dr Gebremariam is using mobile health interventions (mHealth) as a cost-effective way to deliver personalised breastfeeding messages to fathers and mothers by exploring how to adapt an existing app to target fathers with helpful, trusted information. The My Baby Now app was designed to reinforce INFANT, a comprehensive program developed by IPAN researchers over 15 years to help parents and families with healthy eating and active play from the start of their baby's life.

Dr Gebremariam has recruited 190 dads to be part of the study, to discover and understand the type of information they want to help them support their partner with breastfeeding. For the project's next phase, he plans to co-design a new version of the My Baby Now app tailored specifically to fathers and trial it with fathers and mothers to improve breastfeeding.

Dr Gebremariam said his research would contribute to the international evidence on the role of the father in breastfeeding promotion, as well as the processes in developing a targeted mHealth intervention.

“There is a lack of evidence on the effectiveness of interventions targeting both mothers and fathers to encourage and support breastfeeding,” he said.

“I hope my research will inform the development of practical advice that will help dads learn how to support their partner to breastfeed.”