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the job done
right...
do it yourself!**

Milkmen: Fathers Who Breastfeed

by [Laura Shanley](#)

I first became interested in male lactation in 1978 after reading Dana Raphael's book, *The Tender Gift: Breastfeeding*. Although Raphael only dealt with the subject briefly, she did say that men can and have produced milk after stimulating their nipples.

While my husband David had no interest in nursing our son, we both were intrigued with the idea. We had just had our first [unassisted homebirth](#) and were excited about applying our positive thinking techniques to other aspects of our lives. Although Raphael had written about milk production through nipple stimulation, perhaps, we thought, David could do it simply through suggestion. He began telling himself that he would lactate, and within a week, one of his breasts swelled up and milk began dripping out. When we excitedly showed my father (a physician) David's breast he said, "Obviously there's something physiologically wrong with David." The fact that David had willed himself to do this, did not impress him. We knew, however, that this was yet another example of [the power of the mind](#).

Still, we were not ready for David to actually breastfeed our baby. First of all, there was no need for it. I was doing just fine on my own. But more importantly, he simply had no desire to do it. After he discovered that his body had indeed been responsive to his thoughts, he suggested to himself that the lactation would stop, and within a week his breast returned to normal. The experiment had been a success.

We didn't give it much thought after that until years later when I came across a short article called "Male Lactation" by Professor Patty Stuart Macadam of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Toronto (*Compleat Mother*, Fall, 1996, Volume 43).

It is possible, and has been observed in animals and humans. In 1992, 18 Dayak fruit bats were captured from a rainforest in the Krau Game Reserve, Pahang, Malaysia. Of the 10 mature males captured, each had functional mammary glands from which small amounts of milk were expressed. A breast is a breast. Male lactation is physiologically possible and, according to Dr. Robert Greenblatt, production in males can be stimulated by letting a baby suckle for several weeks. Indeed some human males secrete milk at birth and at puberty. Historically, male lactation was noted by the German explorer Alexander Freiherr von Humboldt prior to 1859, who wrote of a 32-year-old man who breastfed his child for five months. It was also observed in a 55-year-old Baltimore man who had been the wetnurse of the children of his mistress.

My interest in male lactation was piqued again when I recently received the following letter from a friend of mine.

I knew these two wonderful guys, very dear friends of mine for years. A mutual acquaintance of ours was pregnant, unplanned, and did not want to do the whole "adoption thing" so when the guys approached her about taking the baby, they just proceeded as if it had been a planned surrogate pregnancy. The guys were adamant that the baby should get breastmilk. So when she was in her 7th month we bought a really good quality breastpump and Ian started pumping, every 2 hours during the day and once during the night. He was wonderful about it! He used an SNS (supplimental nursing system) after she was born, with donated milk from several friends who were nursing. He was making milk but not a full supply. By the time the baby was 12 weeks old he was making a full milk supply! He stayed at home with the baby (he was a massage therapist) and nursed her exclusively until she was 8 months old!! I don't think many people outside their intimate circle knew about it, I'm sure folks would have had a fit if they'd known...but I thought it was wonderful!

While reading my friend's letter, I suddenly remembered my mother telling me years ago that as an infant I once tried to nurse

on my father. I laughed about it at the time, yet I'm sure it is a fairly common occurrence. Babies want to be loved, nursed, and nurtured. The gender of the person doing it is not important.

On the other hand, I think it is safe to say that women are better suited to breastfeeding than men are. They generally produce milk soon after birth, with little or no nipple stimulation. If a mother is completely out of the picture, however, as in the case of adoption, or a mother goes back to work and a baby is left in the care of its father, for some families male breastfeeding might be an acceptable alternative to formula bottles and pacifiers.

For those who claim male lactation is "unnatural," I would have to ask: how natural is canned formula from Nestle' or pacifiers made from petroleum byproducts? If milk production in men were truly unnatural, it wouldn't exist. The fact that it does, leads me to believe that perhaps male lactation is simply nature's back-up system. In any case, it's an interesting phenomenon.

**Additional information:
(Updated Sept. 12, 2007)**

I spoke briefly about male lactation on the show "Naked New York" with Bob Berkowitz. [Click here](#) (new window opens) to watch the interview.

I'm passing this along for Greg Jenner, a producer at Bellwether Media in the UK:

Hello, my name is Greg Jenner and I am developing a documentary for the award-winning TV company, Bellwether Media. I am looking to speak to men who have breast-fed their children, or who plan to do so, for a thoughtful and sensitive insight into the lesser-known elements of modern parenting. We hope to explore the various gender issues, sociological perspectives, biological reasons and psychological nuances which arise when men breastfeed; and we aim to break down its taboo status, showing it to be both natural and practical. Please feel free to get in contact. Absolute confidentiality and discretion is assured. My e-mail is Greg.Jenner@bellwethermedia.co.uk. Many thanks.

Check out this interesting (and unique!) film: [Milk Men](#)

I'm passing this along for Sarah Walker, a social anthropologist in the UK:

I am a social anthropologist currently undertaking research into the sexual politics of breastfeeding. I first became aware of men's capacity to breastfeed upon reading Helen Marieskind's article entitled 'Abnormal Lactation' in the *Journal of Tropical Pediatrics and Environmental Child Health*. Marieskind establishes the scientific case for men's capacity to breastfeed and in doing so effectively undermines one of the key premises underlying much feminist literature on breastfeeding i.e. breastfeeding is the exclusive capacity of women. The fact that man's capacity to breastfeed is left largely unrealised in our society has far-reaching theoretical and practical implications and may be seen to reveal a great deal about our culture. This is a fascinating issue that I am keen to investigate further. I would like to hear from any breastfeeding fathers who are willing to share their experiences with me.

All the best,
Sarah Walker
s0237041@sms.ed.ac.uk

I'm passing this along for Rebecca Bayatti, an associate producer with Monkey Kingdom:

UK TV company seeks men who lactate

I am currently working on a sensitive one hour documentary for a UK channel looking at parents who subscribe to Attachment Parenting values. The film gives a voice to people who are often derided in society due to misinformation on breastfeeding and

will offer them the chance to set the record straight.

We are now making a similarly sensitive film on men who breastfeed. I am now hoping to find out more about this amazing physiological discovery and am really interested in talking to men from both the US and the UK who have experienced it first hand. I would also like to talk to those who are planning to experiment with male lactation in the near future.

At this stage I am only looking to speak to people - there is no commitment and all conversations will be treated confidentially. If you think you could help me with my research, please drop me a line on RebeccaB@monkeykingdom.com

Many thanks,
Rebecca

I'm passing this along for Dan Louw, a researcher with Be Good Films:

UK based TV company is looking for participants in a unique parenting experiment

Were you intrigued by Laura Shanley's article on 'Milkmen'? Would you or your partner be interested in taking part in a ground breaking exploration that will change the way we think about our bodies?

We are looking for an expectant couple that are prepared to swap roles for a *little while*, and let the male have a shot at breastfeeding. The film we intend to make would be a highly sensitive, non-sensational, character driven story about family bonding.

At this stage we are looking only for men who are willing to give the experiment a try. Previous experience would be great, but is absolutely not essential. We will provide comprehensive medical advice and supervision at all stages (if desired).

Ideally we are looking for UK-based participants, but we would also love to hear from interested parties from anywhere in the world.

For more information, please contact dan@begoodfilms.co.uk.

The following article was posted on FunReports.com:

12/15/05 - In the village of Novopokrovka of the Tumen region of Russia, a strange phenomenon has been discovered. A tom-cat called Barsik has been looking after kittens on his own. But that's not all. The strangest thing is that the heroic father "breast-feeds" them. When Barsik's "girlfriend" died, his owners decided to take the kittens. When the kittens were brought, Barsick accepted them and began to feed them right away. And the cat's masters are totally sure that Barsik has milk.

Veterinarians have read of these kinds of cases in special literature but they have never seen anything like that in real life. So it's great luck for them to come across a nursing tom-cat. According to Svetlana Beletskaya, the assistant at the local surgery department, the tom-cat might, genetically, have female signs. Both the pet's masters and the professionals have decided that since he has "adopted" the babies, it would be wiser to let him nurse them.

The Guardian newspaper published an interesting article in June that mentioned fathers who breastfeed. Click [here](#) to read "Are the men of the African Aka tribe the best fathers in the world?"

Excerpt:

It's a question that has united Aristotle, Darwin and my three-year-old in puzzlement: what exactly are male nipples for ? This week, the charity Fathers Direct came up with an answer, courtesy of some research it unearthed about a nomadic tribe of African hunter-gatherers. The answer, it seems, is the one my three-year-old (and Darwin, to be fair) suspected all along: male nipples are there as a stand-in for when mum isn't around and there's a squawking bambino in dire need of something to suck.

In the [news](#), 12/23/04: "Meet the Fockers star Dustin Hoffman is celebrating after becoming a first-time grandfather earlier this month - but the good news has led to him developing breastfeeding urges. His daughter Jenna and her husband Seamus welcomed their son Augustus into the world just three weeks ago, and doting granddad Hoffman admits the experience has given him strange desires. He says, 'I have felt almost the tendency to lactate. We don't realize, but when we're formed in the womb, we have milk glands, before we're differentiated between male or female and before God knows whether to make you male or female. When you think about it, why should men have nipples? And yet we do. I didn't think about it until I started to drip!'"

The May/June 2003 issue of [And Baby](#), a national gay parenting magazine, contains a wonderful article by Jennifer Newton Reents about fathers who breastfeed. David was interviewed for the article, and both my book and web site are mentioned. ***And Baby*** is sold in many grocery stores, as well as most of the larger bookstores.

There is an excellent chapter about fathers who breastfeed in Fiona Giles' book, [Fresh Milk: The Secret Life of Breasts](#) (Simon & Schuster, April 2003). The chapter includes a passage written by a man in Australia who nursed his daughter until she was a year old. While the man didn't attempt to produce milk, he found the emotional connection he made with her very gratifying. The other chapters in the book are equally fascinating. Subjects include: cooking with breastmilk (there are several recipes in the back of the book), breastfeeding triplets, donating milk to a milkbank after the death of a child, adult nursing, inducing lactation for an adopted child, lactation pornography, as well as more conventional topics such as weaning an older child, and dealing with mastitis. Sheila Kitzinger writes of the book, "An exciting, funny and provocative book that covers new ground. Do you fancy a breastmilk cocktail? Are you a breastfeeding father? Does milk spurt out when you make love? All the things that the other books about breastfeeding don't say!"

Jared Diamond, a Pulitzer Prize-winning author and Professor of Geography at the University of California, Los Angeles, wrote about male lactation in his 1997 book ***Why is Sex Fun?: The Evolution of Human Sexuality***:

The potential advantages of male lactation are numerous. It would promote a type of emotional bonding of father to child now available only to women.....Today, many or most mothers in first-world societies have already become unavailable for breast-feeding, whether because of jobs, illness, or lactational failure. Yet not only parents but also babies derive many benefits from breast-feeding. Breast-fed babies acquire stronger immune defenses and are less susceptible to numerous diseases....Male lactation could provide those benefits to babies if the mother is unavailable for any reason.

Diamond also wrote about male laction in his article [Father's Milk](#) (*Discover*, Feb., 1995; pages 83-87):

Experience may tell you that producing milk and nursing youngsters is a job for the female mammal, not the male. But your

experience is probably limited, and the potential of biology - and medical technology - is vast....Brace yourselves, guys. Science is demolishing your last excuses. We've known for some time that many male mammals, including some men, can undergo breast development and lactate under special conditions. We've also known that many otherwise perfectly normal male domesticated goats, with normal testes and the proven ability to inseminate females, surprise their owners (and probably themselves) by spontaneously growing udders and secreting milk....Lactation, then, lies within a male mammal's physiological reach.

Soon, some combination of manual nipple stimulation and hormone injections may develop the confident expectant father's latent potential to make milk [*Note from Laura: I don't recommend hormone injections, nor do I feel they are necessary*]. While I missed the boat myself, it wouldn't surprise me if some of my younger male colleagues, and surely men of my sons' generation, exploit their opportunity to nurse their children. The remaining obstacle will then no longer be physiological but psychological: Will all you guys be able to get over your hang-up that breast-feeding is a woman's job? To read more about Jared Diamond and his work click [here](#).

The Talmud contains an interesting passage on male lactation (from a [1918 translation](#):

The rabbis taught: "It happened with one man whose wife died and left him a nursing child, he was so poor that he could not pay a wet-nurse. A miracle happened to him; his breasts opened and he nursed his child." Said R. Joseph: Come and see how great the man must have been that such a miracle was wrought for him. Said Abayi to him: On the contrary, Behold how bad the man must have been that the nature of mankind changed in him and nothing occurred to enable him to earn enough money to pay a nurse. Says R. Jehudah: Come and see how hard it is for heaven to change the fate of a man concerning his livelihood, that the nature of the world was changed, but not his fate. Said R. Na'hman: It is proven by this fact that a miracle occurred, but he was not provided with means for paying a wet-nurse.

The following passages are from [Anomalies and Curiosities of Medicine](#) by George Gould, M.D. and Walter Pyle, M.D. (1896)

Hunter refers to a man of fifty who shared equally with his wife the suckling of their children. There is an instance of a sailor who, having lost his wife, took his son to his own breast to quiet him, and after three or four days was able to nourish him. Humboldt describes a South American peasant of thirty-two who, when his wife fell sick immediately after delivery, sustained the child with his own milk, which came soon after the application to the breast; for five months the child took no other nourishment. In Franklin's "Voyages to the Polar Seas" he quotes the instance of an old Chippewa who, on losing his wife in childbirth, had put his infant to his breast and earnestly prayed that milk might flow; he was fortunate enough to eventually produce enough milk to rear the child. The left breast, with which he nursed, afterward retained its unusual size. [*Note from Laura: This is definitely something to consider!*]
According to Mehliss some missionaries in Brazil in the sixteenth century asserted that there was a whole Indian nation whose women had small and withered breasts, and whose children owed their nourishment entirely to the males.
Ford mentions the case of a captain who in order to soothe a child's cries put it to his breast, and who subsequently developed a full supply of milk. He also quotes an instance of a man suckling his own children.

The following passage is from *The Sexual Life of Our Time* by Iwan Block, M.D. (1928)

The mammary glands, the original function of which was perhaps the production of odoriferous substances, but which later became devoted solely to the secretion of milk, existed in our ancestors in a larger number than in the present human race. This is clearly shown by the fact that the human embryo normally exhibits a "hyperthelia," an excess of breasts, of which, however, two only normally undergo development; moreover, the breasts of the male, which are now in a state of arrested development, were formerly better developed, and served, like those of the female, the purpose of nourishing the offspring. These facts are clearly explicable on the assumption that at one time the number of offspring at a single birth was considerable, and that in this way the preservation of the species was favoured.

Claudia McCreary wrote about inducing lactation in both males and females in her article [Male Wet Nurses Wanted](#) (registration may be required). My only argument with Claudia is that in addition to nipple stimulation, she believes that herbs and/or medication must also be taken. I also disagree with her premise that men who wish to breastfeed must be assisted by professionals. As my husband David's experience proves, the mind is more powerful than most of us realize. Visualization and affirmations can be used in lue of herbs or medication. If more assistance is necessary, a breast pump can be utilized.

Passages about male lactation can also be found in the following books:

[Unassisted Childbirth](#) by Laura Kaplan Shanley (1994)

Breast Feeding and Human Lactation by Jan Riordan & Kathy Auerbach (1993)

Breastfeeding: a Guide for the Medical Profession by Ruth Lawrence (1989)

Biological Anomalies: Mammals II: A Catalog of Biological Anomalies
by William Corliss (1996)

Lactating man in "Emblematic Figures" by Giulio Romano, 1499 - 1546



The following article appeared in [The Mercury](#) newspaper on October 30, 2002.

Sri Lankan widower breastfeeds his babies

Colombo - A 38-year-old Sri Lankan man, whose wife had died three months ago, appears to have the ability to breastfeed his two infant daughters, doctors said on Wednesday.

The man, from the central town of Walapone, lost his wife during childbirth.

"My eldest daughter refused to be fed with powdered milk liquid in the feeding bottle.

"I was so moved one evening and to stop her crying I offered my breast. I then realised that I was capable of breastfeeding her," the man admitted.

Dr Kamal Jayasinghe, deputy director of a Sri Lankan government hospital, was quoted as saying it was possible for men to produce milk if the prolactin hormone became hyperactive. - Sapa-AFP

Male goats are known to occasionally produce milk. To the right of this goat's back leg are his testicles. To the left is an udder.



To read more about fathers who breastfeed see [The Nursing Father](#) by Judie Rall.

~ [Bornfree!](#) ~ [The Shanleys](#) ~ [Unassisted Childbirth](#) ~ [Your Sensual Self](#) ~ [Joy - Be Inspired!](#) ~ [Misc](#) ~

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