



AYOT PLACE PRACTICE

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BREAST FEEDING and its problems

Breast milk is a unique and wonderful source of food designed for infant humans. It contains ingredients to nourish a child and to build a strong healthy immune system. The process of breastfeeding builds a strong physical, emotional and spiritual bond between a mother and her child and it is the most natural thing in the world. Breast-feeding should not be a cause for pain, embarrassment or shame. It is a miracle! Midwives and health visitors do vary in their approach to breast feeding, so if you are not comfortable with the information you have been given, then do ask someone else such as a mother who has had a happy breastfeeding experience or ask one of the breastfeeding and child birth support organisations such as:

La Leche League- 020 72421278

National Childbirth Trust- 0870 4448708

Association of Breastfeeding Mothers- 0207 813 1481

Breastfeeding Network- 0870 900 8787

This Fact Sheet is not intended to replace the excellent breastfeeding counselling available from these organisations but is meant as a general guide to breastfeeding and its problems.

The Basics

Basically, lactation works on a 'demand and supply' principle, i.e. baby sucks, milk is produced; the more baby sucks, the more milk is produced. So, if a nursing mother is short of milk then it is NOT a good idea to stop feeding – this will not cause the supply to build up and is more likely to stop the flow. The fact is, the more often a baby suckles, the more milk is produced and vice versa.

Hungry Baby

Babies have growth spurts, and at these times they need increased amounts of milk. With a bottle fed baby, this demand is easy to spot; the baby empties the bottles and an extra portion of milk is added to the bottle next time. With a breast fed baby, the infant demands milk more frequently and can be unsatisfied after feeds. The natural response to this should be to put the baby back to the breast more often. This stimulates increased milk supply and, after a few days, things go back to a more manageable routine. Almost every mother has enough milk for her baby, otherwise the human race would have died out a very long time ago! So, give the process time to right itself and think carefully about immediately turning to a bottle if baby seems unsatisfied- if you do, then it is likely that your supply of milk will reduce.

One Side or both?

The fat content of milk increases as the feed progresses. There is an argument for allowing baby to feed a breast at a time if milk seems a little sparse, this ensures that the let down happens and the rich milk is also taken. So rather than 5 minutes per breast regimented, 7 minutes on one and 2-3 on the other alternating is sometimes suggested, and a baby might well feed from one breast for 20 or 30 minutes.

This is a complex issue and views do differ, so you might want to talk to a breastfeeding counsellor at one of the organisations mentioned above.

Feeding Regime

Another fallacy is the 'feeding regime' of feeding a baby at determined intervals. Breast milk changes in constituency over the day/night, and so do the baby's needs. Do you always eat exactly the same amount of food, at exactly the same intervals? Of course not, so why should a baby? The mother's own food intake, level of activity, need for rest etc all have a profound effect on her milk production. It is all right to let babies 'snack' at the breast- considering that this is the behaviour most likely to improve milk supply frequency, rather than length of time spent feeding.

Worry

New mothers are usually extremely tired, probably stressed and, if it is the first baby, may be completely bewildered and scared. They may not be sleeping much, may not be eating much, and may have sore breasts, sore perineum's, and sore backs. The best way of interfering with milk production is to worry about it, so try to relax into it, and 99 times out of 100 it will start to come easily and naturally. If you are supporting a new breastfeeding mother, keep it simple, and gently encourage her. Warmth and someone giving a massage on the mother's back also help.

Growth charts

If used correctly, they are very accurate at pinpointing problems in a baby's progress. 'Correctly' means looking at the overall trend, not individual instances of gain/loss, and understanding how they work, which many people do not. But many health visitors and midwives (not to mention GPs, dieticians etc, who are not trained to use them properly) tend to panic, especially in the early days. It is normal for a breast fed baby to lose weight in the first week or so, and then to start gaining at a much slower rate than bottle-fed babies. If the mother and all around her can keep their nerve during these early days, usually all is well. Many babies are started on bottle feeding by well meaning, but panicky, health visitors who cannot bear to see the growth chart line going down instead of up. But growth charts have their uses, not least of which is spotting those children who are failing to thrive because of child abuse.

Curious

You may be interested to know that a new born baby, if placed on its mothers abdomen immediately after birth for about half an hour, will 'crawl' up its mothers body and locate the nipple, all by itself. Also that it can recognise the smell of its own mothers breast milk from a breast pad, when presented with pads soaked in milk from several mothers.

The role of herbs.

Milk Supply

A number of herbs are used to increase the supply of breast milk- Fennel is one of the best galactagogues and will also help with infant colic, so a cup of Fennel tea taken by the mother will

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be good for both mother and baby. Colic can be the result of a tense mother, or poor positioning at the breast. Chamomile is also good as a tea to soothe mother and baby. Other herbs used to increase the flow of breast milk are aniseeds, Fenugreek, Alfalfa, Caraway and Milk thistle seed

To dry up milk

The main herb is sage taken as a tea. Jasmine flowers as a tea applied to the breast, is a popular remedy in India. Sage teas 3 times a day should be effective. Raspberry leaf has a reputation of being a little drying so, if you are using it to tone the uterus after the birth, limit yourself to a cup a day

Mastitis and other infections of the mother

Sometimes it might be necessary for the mother to take antibiotics, but many mothers will only do this as a last resort for fear that the antibiotics will be present in the breast milk and they wish to avoid this.

Mastitis is inflammation of the breast, often resulting from a blocked milk duct, but it can also be due to a knock, or tight or uncomfortable clothing or bra. The first sign is a red, swollen, possibly hot and often painful area on the breast. Infection is not always present. Emptying a breast before moving on to the other one is one way of reducing the likelihood of getting mastitis. Keep feeding from the sore breast –also expressing after feeds to keep the breasts drained if they feel uncomfortably full. An old remedy for mastitis is the use of a Savoy cabbage shell. Half a cabbage is hollowed out and popped into a saucepan of boiling water for a couple of minutes to soften it, when cool it is placed over the breast, perhaps wrapping the back with Clingfilm to prevent getting cabbage all over your bra. Cabbage is an excellent anti-inflammatory.

I make a special mastitis cream, which comprises slippery elm, chamomile and marshmallow powders mixed with echinacea tincture-, this helps to draw out any blockage and deal with any infection.

Prevention of mastitis

Mastitis starts with poor milk drainage. If the baby is not in a good position then some parts of the breast may not be draining properly, so check your position otherwise you might get frequent bouts of mastitis. Avoid suddenly going for longer than normal periods between feeding- cut down gradually if possible.

Avoid wearing a bra or other clothing that is too tight.

Try not to let breast get too full.

The water from boiled dandelion root applied to the breast as a compress is an old remedy. Echinacea is safe for use by the mother if she has any sort of infection and many mothers prefer to use this rather than antibiotics while breast-feeding.

Also, you could try to use a wide toothed comb stroked gently over the red area towards the nipple to aid milk flow. Gentle massage or applying warmth to the affected area can also help. If self-help measures don't work and if the mother's temperature becomes high and there is considerable pain in the breast then it may be necessary to resort to the use of antibiotics. The mother should not delay in seeking this course of action, but this does not need to be the first avenue of treatment as infection is not always present.

Thrush

This is a yeast-like fungal infection that can affect mother and/or baby, especially after the mother has been taking anti-biotics and it may also occur where there has been an injury to the nipple.

Signs in the mother include:

- Pain starts AFTER the feed
- Itchy, sensitive, painful nipples
- Cracked nipples that will not heal
- Change in the colour to nipple
- Pain in one or both breasts- this can also be a shooting pain and can last up to an hour after feeding

Signs in Baby:

- Creamy white patches which will not rub off in the mouth on the tongue or on the cheeks
- Baby seems uncomfortable or sore - pulling away from the breast while still obviously hungry
- Nappy rash

Of course breast pain can result from poor attachment or positioning, so if in doubt ask your midwife, breastfeeding counsellor or health visitor

If you have thrush then your health advisor will normally recommend anti-fungal medical treatment.

Self Help

- Drink Calendula tea and use calendula cream on the nipple
- Other herbs with anti-fungal properties include Liquorice, Golden Seal, and Myrrh

Eczema of the Nipple

Again herbal creams can be very effective. Herbs such as those used for fungal infection are often used and some special eczema herbs – so a herbalist may well make up a cream of Chickweed, Chamomile, Liquorice, Marigold and Comfrey

Finally

Remember that herbs have always had an important role to play in the care of the mother and child before, during and after the birth. Since the beginning of time, plants have been used, and with the help of a qualified herbalist, they can ease those less than delightful aspects of becoming a mother, easing pain, inflammation, fear and discomfort.

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