

## **Breastfeeding: Homœopathy plus some Motherly Tips**

The birth of a baby, while being a special event and an occasion for celebration, is attended with a unique range of stresses. As with having any new individual move into a household, a period of adjustment is required by all parties. No matter how many times a mother has given birth before, she needs space, time and some assistance, to adjust to the demands of this new baby who also has his own special needs associated with adjusting to the extra-uterine environment.

Those first few weeks of breastfeeding may require some extra support. Homœopathy is a wonderful treatment of choice at such times, as it will not affect the baby, and it can quickly bring resolution of any problem. Should the baby need some treatment also, homœopathy is gentle and easy to administer even to a new-born. It is always recommended that a professional homœopath be consulted, as it is important to choose the most appropriate medicine based on 'key note' symptoms of the patient or on their constitution. A professional homœopath will also select the potency and repetition of the medicine according to the patient's state.

It may also be important in breastfeeding difficulties to seek the help of a lactation consultant. Babies who are at the mercy of a fast flow and an abundant milk supply are often tense while at the breast if they are held in the traditional Madonna position. This position may result in the nasal sinuses and eustachian tubes being assaulted with milk if the baby does not keep up with the flow. The consequent enhanced peristaltic activity results in the milk being forced beyond the stomach (which in the newborn is barely the size of a walnut) to the small intestine where it ferments. Most forms of tummy upset in the newborn are simply the result of not being able to digest large amounts of milk appropriately. This problem is compounded if antibiotics are given to either the mother or baby as they interfere with the establishment of appropriate gut flora.

Feeding protocols such as an upright position and the use of one breast only for top ups within a two hour period help to minimise tummy pain. When feeding in an upright position the baby feels more in charge and will often pause. By taking the milk in a more leisurely manner first phase digestion in the stomach occurs before the milk passes to the intestines for second phase digestion. If the milk is fatty it literally stays in the stomach for longer. So, by using only one breast at a feed, the fat-rich hind milk is accessed and this helps to slow down gut motility. It helps also if the mother makes sure that at least 2 tablespoons of good quality fats (for example fish, plant oils, nuts excluding peanuts and seeds) are consumed each day. Fatty milk makes the baby more content and helps with the attainment of 150 grams a week which is considered a good average weight gain for a breastfed baby.

### **COLIC, REFLUX AND LACTOSE INTOLERANCE**

The true milk is fully in by the beginning of the third week, the earlier secretion being colostrum and then transitional milk which tends to be high in protein and low in lactose. The common problems of colic, reflux or lactose intolerance are, therefore, held in abeyance until the high lactose secretion of the mature milk prevails.

Six to eight wet nappies a day and a dirty nappy containing stool the consistency of thick gravy (either daily or once a week both are considered 'normal') are additional indicators that all is going smoothly. However, if the baby produces a dirty nappy after most feeds and these are passed with explosive force, it may well be that a problem with coping with lactose exists.

As lactose is one of the factors in milk that assists with development of the brain, it makes sense that human milk is high in lactose as our brains are among the most highly developed in the mammalian kingdom. In the early weeks while the baby's lactase (the enzyme for the digestion of lactose found on the tips of the intestinal villi) levels are rising, keeping lactose exposure down helps to minimise colic symptoms. Plenty of protein and good fat in the maternal diet at the expense of carbohydrate (especially simple carbohydrate) keeps the lactose levels in the milk marginally lower. This phenomenon is called the 'compensation effect' and is a simple way of assisting the baby to cope with the digestion of lactose. High fat foods that also high in zinc encourage production of lactase in the baby. Well-spaced feeds will also help.

The acute pain associated with these forms of indigestion is well-managed with homœopathic medicines such as *Mag carb*, *Dioscorea* and *Colocynthus* prescribed according to the keynote symptoms of the baby. Lactose intolerance that remains a problem despite mother's change of diet can also be dealt with using constitutional homœopathic prescribing.

### **ENGORGED BREASTS**

This is a common condition, especially in the first few days, as the increased blood volume of the uterus re-routes to the breasts. Applying a cold washer or bruised cabbage leaf to the breast after feeding can reduce the heat and congestion. Engorgement is well treated with medicines including *Phytolacca*.

### **BLOCKED DUCT, MASTITIS, BREAST ABSCESS**

Mothers who are seemingly plagued with mastitis often suffer from a chronic oversupply of milk which means that the breast is rarely well drained. One sided feeding helps to minimise nipple stimulation (which results in lowered levels of prolactin and, therefore over time, decreased milk volume), and the prescription of the mother's constitutional remedy also assists in righting the balance.

However, if there is a fever along with soreness and a lump in the breast, with or without redness, homœopathic treatment is effective and much safer than antibiotics. Medicines such as *Belladonna* and *Bryonia* can be very effective, given at the right potency and repetition, so it is important to consult with a professional homœopath. Other helpful hints include: use hot and cold compresses and massage the breast gently; sit in a warm bath, express a little milk then 'comb' the affected breast from the outside towards the nipple (use a plastic comb that has been run through a bar of soap); increase fluid intake and rest more if possible.

Should the breast become caked and hard and too painful to do any of the above, try soaking the breast in a dish of warm water with Epsom salts or lie prone in an Epsom salts bath.

### **INSUFFICIENT MILK**

Some mothers struggle with producing enough milk to satisfy the baby. Since insulin is one of the hormones involved in milk production, it is important to look at the mother's nutrition, especially with respect to protein (a palm size serving of protein five times a day is a good guide). Fluid intake may be too low, or caffeine, tobacco and alcohol could be dampening milk supply. It is helpful to feed the baby often to build up the supply.

There are many 'galactagogues' (medicines that promote the flow of milk) in the homœopathic pharmacopœia so this problem is also effectively treated with homœopathy.

### **SORE OR CRACKED NIPPLES**

Women with sensitive nipples are more likely to have problems in this area. It is very important to look after sore nipples as they can easily go on to crack and bleed. Express a little milk first if the breasts are really full to soften the areola so the baby can attach more easily.

Try feeding in different positions to distribute the sucking pressure to different areas of the areola. Before removing the baby from the nipple, break the suction with your finger. Allow the nipples to be exposed to the air whenever possible. Do not wash nipples with soap or shampoo too often.

Cracked and bleeding nipples often respond well to such medicines as *Sepia*, *Sulphur*, *Graphites*, *Causticum* or *Castor equii*. Many other remedies may be indicated depending on the predominant symptomatology.

### **THRUSH**

If the mother has a history of thrush, she could possibly develop thrush in the breast. Radiating or shooting pain in the breast and rosy red nipples are reliable signs. As well as using homœopathic medicines to assist with the treatment of thrush (antibiotics and anti fungal preparations need not ever need be used), scrupulous attention to the diet is essential – no yeasts and sugars. If some of the mother's old systemic thrush symptoms return, it is important for her to have a consultation with her homœopath as the use of anti fungals may encourage the recurrence of breast thrush.

### **SOLIDS**

Some babies, especially in those families where there tends to be food intolerance problems, have trouble with adjusting to solid foods. Again, there are several medicines which can assist in this regard, with *Nat carb* being one of the ones most commonly used. If food intolerance is such a problem that the baby begins to lose condition, remedies such as *Sanicula* and *Silica* can help to put things right again. The introduction of solids begins the weaning process which is usually a gradual event. There's no 'best time' to wean and it depends on what suits both mother and baby.

At birth the infant's brain is only 25% of its final size, reaching 80% by 12 months with the completion of CNS maturation occurring by 3 years of age. Having some breast milk until that age certainly helps to maximise potential on all levels. However, if this is not desirable or possible, good constitutional homœopathic prescribing can assist the baby with making the adjustment to life beyond the breast.

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