

## **Newborns, feeding and latching difficulties**

We often underestimate how challenging breastfeeding can be at times. It is a skill that cannot be mastered prior to the arrival of your little one. In the first few days after delivery, your body has yet to recover from the recent physical and emotional changes. It can therefore be difficult and painful to breastfeed.

Remember that although breastfeeding can come naturally to most mothers and babies, it is a learning process that requires time, concentration and effort for you both.

Midwives and lactation consultants are available to advice on how to achieve a pain-free latch. Most of the time, this helps create an amazing bond.

However, there are circumstances in which external factors and stressors (forceps, ventouse, emergency C-section, complications during pregnancy...) cause dysfunctions and alter the mechanics of your baby's jaw, tongue or neck muscles. These dysfunctions will very often cause the baby to: bite the nipple with their gum, not latch on properly and come off the latch quickly. Your baby may be fussy and irritable during feeds or latch only on one breast due to inability to turn his head properly on both sides.

An osteopath can help resolve these issues, using very gentle and pain free techniques. They will assess:

1. The alignment of the spine and skull symmetry. The shape of the skull should not present any flat spots. A flat head or asymmetrical head (plagiocephaly) can be caused by muscle tensions in the neck (torticollis). Does your baby favour one side over the other? This may bother them when they are trying to latch on.
2. The movement of the tongue and of the mandible. These are key factors that influence a good and effective latch. Is your baby's tongue moving forward sufficiently? Is there a tongue tie restricting its mobility? How is the mandible positioned? In order for the jaw muscles to function properly, the mandible should articulate well (gliding forward and backward) and allow a smooth opening of the mouth.

Remember that above all, breastfeeding requires practice. If you feel something is not quite right, do not delay seeking treatment and advice. Osteopaths specialised in paediatrics are available to help you should you have any concerns. Babies can be seen a few days after birth and the earlier a dysfunction is identified, the shorter the treatment plan for you and your baby will be.

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