



Chiropractic Newsletter

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Tongue-Tie: A Holistic Approach for Breastfeeding Infants

New moms are well aware of the importance of breastfeeding. Moms who are eager to breastfeed their newborns often find themselves disheartened if they run into difficulties with nursing.

They may find the infant is having trouble maintaining suction, or chewing on the nipple, or becoming irritable during and after nursing. An infant may tire from the added effort and fall asleep before eating enough. Insufficient weight gain may become a concern. The mother, in turn, may suffer from blocked milk ducts, painful breasts or cracked nipples, and may become frustrated and discontinue nursing. Often this leads to the mother feeling depressed and believing that if she cannot meet her child's needs she is not a good mother.

Breastfeeding is by far the best choice for infant feeding for numerous reasons. In an article in Pathways No. 11 titled "Breastfeeding Difficulties and Chiropractic," author Jeanne Ohm, D.C., offers the chiropractic perspective: "Significant research shows that from a nutritional, immunological, digestive, neurological, developmental, mental, psychological and emotional standpoint, there is no replacement."

Chiropractic care offers a conservative approach that appeals to many parents. It is gentle, non-invasive and proven safe for children. As chiropractors we assume the structural makeup of the infant is intact and then we look for what is obstructing normal function. Chiropractic care facilitates the child's body to heal on its own. In her article, Ohm states, "In the case of breastfeeding difficulty, as with many childhood disorders, the cause of the problem often traces back to undetected biomechanical injuries to the spine and cranium at birth. The failure to recognize these biomechanical injuries and their relationship to difficulty in breastfeeding leads to

incorrect conclusions and, therefore, inadequate recommendations and treatments."

These "biomechanical injuries" are termed subluxations. Subluxations are misalignments of the bones that interfere with the nerve transmission (communication) to the area and in turn the function of a joint. The spinal bones (vertebrae), bones of the skull (cranial bones) and facial bones including the TMJ (temporomandibular joint) all participate in the process of latching and sucking. A baby that is having difficulties nursing most likely has subluxation in one or more of these areas. It has been my experience that when an infant is subluxated in these areas and adjusted, these obstacles to nursing are corrected and normal function returns. Breastfeeding is then resumed.

Subluxations can occur in a number of ways exacerbated by physical, chemical or emotional stresses. Williams Obstetrics, the "bible of obstetrics," parallels chiropractic theory by stating, "the diameter of the woman's pelvis is decreased when the sacrum is displaced." In this circumstance the mother has a misalignment or subluxation of the pelvis. This may interfere with the baby's ability to attain the optimal positioning. Compression on developing fetal structures and the nerves they protect may occur with this alteration in positioning.

Additionally, the birth process is a traumatic event for the newborn even under normal circumstances. Even when the baby is in the optimal position, obstetric intervention to extract the baby may cause undue force to the baby's head and neck. Another article by Ohm, "Birthing with the Wisdom of the Ages" (published in Pathways No. 40), reports: "One medical study, published in Developmental Medicine

& Child Neurology, addresses this issue even further. The study's author, Dr. Abraham Towbin, writes, 'The birth process even under optimal controlled conditions is potentially a traumatic, crippling event for the fetus.... Moreover during the last part of delivery, during the final extraction of the fetus, mechanical stress imposed by obstetrical manipulation—even the application of standard orthodox procedures—may prove intolerable to the fetus.'" The resulting subluxations in the cranium and upper neck region may have a negative impact on breastfeeding. Deliveries employing mechanical devices, such as forceps and vacuum extractions, use excessive force and add extreme stress to the baby's cranium, spine and nervous system.

Frequently, present-day obstetricians advocate C-sections as a comparable alternative to vaginal birth. However, many prospective parents and practitioners are aware of the traumatic effects of C-section on the newborn and mother. Extracting the baby through layers of the mother's muscles puts even greater force on the baby's head and spine and may result in changes in alignment of the spine or the cranium. Additionally, a C-section delivery deprives the baby of an essential process called molding. The cranium of an infant is made up of separate bones held together by cartilage. During the birth process the bones overlap and return to an optimal position that allows them to be freely moveable. The mobility of the cranial bones is important because subluxated cranial bones can interfere with the child's ability to latch and suck.

Chiropractors are interested in educating our communities as to the effectiveness of chiropractic care in restoring the baby's normal ability to breastfeed. Presently, ankyloglossia is diagnosed in 5 percent of newborns. There is no clear evidence in

the literature that surgery for tongue-tie is the answer for latching issues or that it occurs as often as it is diagnosed.

Moms who receive this diagnosis for their child should look further into the possible cause of distress and seek out chiropractic care before resorting to surgery. This alternative approach can be their "Plan A," before moving to an invasive "Plan B."

I encourage you to learn about the many benefits of chiropractic care as part of a wellness and healthy lifestyle program as your children develop and grow into young adults.

—Andrea Auerbach, DC, CACCP

Appearing in Pathways to

Family Wellness Magazine Issue 48

