Breastfeeding, Nursing Strike

A nursing strike is when your baby has been nursing well for months and then suddenly loses interest in breastfeeding. The baby begins to refuse the breast. A nursing strike can mean several things are happening with your baby. She or he is trying to communicate with you to let you know that something is wrong. Not all babies will react the same to different situations that can cause a nursing strike. Some will continue to breastfeed without a problem, others may just become fussy at the breast, and others will refuse the breast entirely.

CAUSES

- Mouth pain from teething, a fungal infection, or a cold sore.
- An ear infection.
- Pain from a certain nursing position.
- Being upset about a long separation from the mother or a major change in routine.
- Being interested in other things around him or her.
- A cold or stuffy nose that makes breathing hard.
- Reduced milk supply from supplementing with bottles or overuse of a pacifier.
- Responding to the mother's strong reaction if the baby has bitten her.
- Being upset about hearing arguing or people talking in a harsh voice with other family members while nursing.
- Reacting to stress, over-stimulation, or having been repeatedly put off when wanting to nurse.

If your baby is on a nursing strike, it is normal to feel frustrated and upset, especially if your baby is unhappy. It is important not to feel guilty or that you have done something wrong. Your breasts also may become uncomfortable as the milk builds up.

TREATMENT

- Try to draw out your milk manually or with a breast pump on the same schedule as the baby used to breastfeed. This may help to avoid engorgement and plugged ducts.
- Try another feeding method temporarily to give your baby your milk, such as a cup, dropper, or spoon. Keep track of your baby's wet diapers to make sure he/she is getting enough milk (5-6 per day).
- Keep offering your breast to the baby. If the baby is frustrated, stop and try again later. Try when the baby is sleeping or very sleepy.
- Try various breastfeeding positions.
- Focus on the baby with all of your care. Comfort him or her with extra touching and cuddling.
- Try nursing while rocking in a quiet room, free of distractions.

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