

Provider Information

BF – Breastfeeding

BF-SM STRESS MANAGEMENT

OUTCOME: The patient will understand the role of stress management in the lactating mother.

STANDARDS:

1. Explain that uncontrolled stress may result in problems with milk letdown and reduced milk supply and effective stress management may increase the success of breastfeeding.
2. Explain that difficulty with breastfeeding may result in feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, or failure as a mother.
3. Emphasize the importance of seeking help (e.g., lactation consultant, public health nurse or other nurse, WIC) as needed to improve breastfeeding success and reduce stress. Provide referrals as appropriate
4. Discuss that stress may exacerbate adverse health behaviors such as increased tobacco, alcohol, or other substance use, which may reduce the ability to breast-feed successfully.
5. Discuss various stress management strategies that may help maintain a healthy lifestyle. Examples may include:
 - a. Becoming aware of your own reactions to stress
 - b. Recognizing and accepting your limits
 - c. Recruiting other family members or friends to help with childcare
 - d. Talking with people you trust about your worries or problems
 - e. Setting realistic goals
 - f. Getting enough sleep (e.g., sleeping when the baby sleeps if possible)
 - g. Maintaining a reasonable diet
 - h. Exercising regularly
 - i. Practicing meditation, self-hypnosis, and positive imagery
 - j. Practicing physical relaxation methods such as deep breathing or progressive muscular relaxation
 - k. Participating in spiritual or cultural activities

Both short- and long-term stress can affect your body. In fact, stress can make you more likely to get sick. It can also make problems you already have worse. It can play a part in a range of issues, including trouble sleeping, stomach problems, headaches, and

mental health conditions. Having a new baby and learning how to breastfeed can be very stressful events. It is important for mothers to take care of themselves. Try to listen to your body so that you can tell when stress is affecting your health, and take these steps to feel better!

How Does Stress Really Affect Breastfeeding?

Stress can adversely affect a breastfeeding mother's milk supply and nursing. Extreme stress can inhibit milk letdown, cause frustration, and even cause the milk supply to diminish if the stress is prolonged. How the mother handles stress varies, some moms, and their milk supply is affected more by stress than others.

If this is a first child then the mother's life has changed overnight. Even mothers with other children can find that every day stresses have doubled and might feel overwhelmed at times.

Working moms have an added stresses in time limited pumping at work. A working mother who is breastfeeding will spend her lunch hour and breaks trying to eat with a breast pump whirring in the background. If she is very concerned over maintaining milk supply this can lead to extra stress and even reduce supply.

Understanding that stress can affect the milk supply of the breastfeeding mother is the first step. The second step to handling stresses is to attempt to reduce them as much as possible.

Moms who are stressed over maintaining an adequate milk supply while using a breast pump at work can actually be reducing their milk supply by worrying. It is very easy to say, "relax" however, it is harder to do. If time is a concern while breast pumping at work the mom might consider purchasing a double electric breast pump. A double electric breast pump will empty both breasts at once and is much faster than an ordinary pump.

Daily stress for the stay at home mother can be just as difficult as stress may reduce the amount of milk you are able to produce and in the "let-down" of your milk.

A few Tips for Dealing with Stress

- **Get help from a professional if you need it.** A therapist can help you work through stress and find better ways to deal with problems. For more serious stress-related disorders, like post-traumatic stress disorder, therapy can be helpful. There also are medications that can help ease symptoms of depression and anxiety and help promote sleep.
- **Relax.** It is important to unwind in a way that works for you. Try a bubble bath, deep breathing, yoga, meditation, and massage therapy. If you cannot do these things, take a few minutes to sit, listen to soothing music, or read a book.
- **Sleep.** Your stress could get worse if you do not get enough sleep. It is hard to fight off illness when you sleep poorly. With enough sleep, it is easier to cope

with challenges and stay healthy. Try to get seven to nine hours of sleep every night. If you cannot, try to sleep when the baby sleeps.

- **Eat right.** Try to fuel up with fruits, vegetables, proteins, and whole grains..
- **Get moving.** Physical activity not only helps relieve your tense muscles but helps your mood too! Your body makes certain chemicals, called endorphins, before and after you exercise. These relieve stress and improve your mood. If you are a new mother, ask your doctor when it is okay to start exercising.
- **Talk to friends.** Friends can be good listeners. Finding someone who will let you talk freely about your problems and feelings without judging you does a world of good. It also helps to hear a different point of view. Friends will remind you that you are not alone.
- **Compromise.** Sometimes, it is not always worth the stress to argue. Give in once in awhile.
- **Keep a journal.** Write down your thoughts. Have you ever typed an e-mail to a friend about your lousy day and felt better afterward? Why not grab a pen and paper and write down what is going on in your life! Keeping a journal can be a great way to get things off your chest and work through issues.
- **Help others.** Helping someone else can help you. Help your neighbor, or volunteer in your community.
- **Get a hobby.** Find something you enjoy. Make sure to give yourself time to explore your interests.
- **Set limits.** Figure out what you can really do. There are only so many hours in the day. Set limits with yourself and others. Do not be afraid to say no to requests for your time and energy.
- **Plan your time.** Think ahead about how you are going to spend your time. Write a to-do list. Figure out which tasks are the most important to do.
- **Do not deal with stress in unhealthy ways.** This includes drinking too much alcohol, using drugs, or smoking, all of which can harm the baby. It is also unhealthy to over-eat in response to stress.

Click here for a Patient Education Handout for the mother on [Stress Management during breastfeeding](#).

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