

## Provider Information

### BF – Breastfeeding

#### BF-T TEETHING

**OUTCOME:** The parent/family will understand teething behaviors and ways to prevent biting while breastfeeding.

#### **STANDARDS:**

1. Explain the normal stages of teething, e.g., sore swollen gums and the baby's tendency to nurse to ease discomfort.
2. Identify ways to anticipate and prevent biting in a teething baby (e.g., closely observing the baby while nursing to interrupt potential biting).
3. Explain the variety of techniques to discourage persistent biting (e.g., keeping finger poised near baby's mouth to interrupt chomping, briefly stopping the feeding, firmly say "no" and break the latch).

#### **Breastfeeding and Teething**

A baby might refuse to breast-feed – and the Mom is trying to figure out why? Refusing to breast-feed for a period of time after breast-feeding well for months might be caused by several things. Your baby is trying to tell you that something is different. It is not always easy to figure out why your baby refuses to nurse.

Teething (or even thrush or a cold sore) can cause mouth pain during breast-feeding, and an ear infection can cause pain during sucking. An injury or soreness from an immunization might cause discomfort in a certain breast-feeding position. Before the actual teeth erupt, you may feel the emerging teeth below the skin of the gums. If you cannot feel the teeth – you may be at a loss trying to figure out why your baby will not take the breast.

Teething is one of the most common causes of frequent night waking during the second six months and through the second year. It can also cause fussy nursing behavior, as some babies experience gum discomfort with sucking. Your baby might start to nurse, but then pull off and cry or fuss and not want to nurse anymore. Other babies nurse nearly constantly because the nursing is soothing to them.

#### **Some things that help teething babies:**

- "Anesthetize" baby's gums with a frozen/refrigerated teething ring, or rub ice cube on his gums (you can even make a game of it). Try to get baby to nurse. If he pulls off/screams again, repeat the ice-rub.
- Put some crushed ice into a clean baby sock and tie off the top. Since it can "mold" around the gum, this is often helpful for painful teething. The fabric is easy and comfortable for baby to handle and babies like the texture of the fabric, too.
- Freeze or refrigerate a wet washcloth for baby to chew on.

- Talk to your baby's doctor about using a baby pain reliever 30-45 minutes before nursing.
- Avoid using Orajel/benzocaine (or other topical anesthetics) directly prior to breastfeeding, as it numbs baby's mouth and can make breastfeeding very difficult for baby.
- Teething babies occasionally bite. If your baby bites you during breast-feeding, slip your finger into your baby's mouth to quickly break the suction.

### **Will I need to wean when baby gets teeth?**

Many people think that when baby gets teeth and has the ability to bite, then the nursing relationship has ended and it is time to wean. Not true! If your baby is nursing properly, then you should not feel teeth, even if baby has a mouthful of them. Keep in mind that it is physically impossible for baby to nurse and bite at the same time, because the tongue covers the bottom teeth/gum when baby is nursing.

Some babies never bite, but biting is a behavior that most babies do try, usually when they are teething. Rest assured that biting can be stopped with a little persistence on the mother's part. Biting is, for the vast majority of moms, a temporary issue that only lasts a few days to a couple of weeks.

Ways to prevent biting.

- **Biting at the end of a nursing session:** Biting often takes place at the end of a nursing session when baby is getting bored and is no longer hungry. If you start to have a biting problem, watch for signs of boredom, and take baby from the breast before the biting starts. Also, watch for tension in baby's jaw before he starts to bite down. Your baby may also pull the tongue back from the normal position over the lower gum/teeth.
- **When baby is teething:** Biting can also be brought on by teething. If baby seems to be teething rather than wanting to nurse, offer her a teething toy or something cold to bite (instead of you). Offer baby a teething toy after a bite or "near miss." When you do this, tell him/her, "This is for biting. Be gentle when you nurse."
- **Biting at the beginning of a nursing session:** make sure baby opens wide when latching on. If your teething baby is biting at the beginning of a nursing session, try giving your baby a teething toy or something cold to chew on before nursing. Praise baby when he/she latches on correctly, without biting.
- **Distracted baby:** When baby is distracted, do not force a nursing. If your baby is wriggling, rolling, or pushing against you with his arms, he may not be hungry or interested in nursing. Try lying down with your baby in a quiet room, walking or rocking.
- **Biting for attention:** Focus your attention on your baby while nursing. Some older babies will bite for attention. Paying attention will also help you to be aware of when baby is about to bite.

## Refusing the breast

When your baby refuses to breast-feed – it can be uncomfortable for you and your baby. You might feel rejected and frustrated. It is important, however, not to feel guilty. Try to be patient as you manage this change in your baby's eating habits. To avoid engorgement and plugged ducts and maintain your milk supply, express your milk on the same schedule your baby used to breast-feed. Choose a temporary alternative for feeding your baby, such as a cup, spoon, dropper or bottle. In addition, consider ways to encourage your baby to breast-feed. For example:

- **Keep trying.** Keep offering your breast to your baby, especially when he or she is sleepy. If your baby is frustrated, stop and try again later. Express milk onto your nipple or your baby's mouth to encourage him or her to nurse. Feed your baby using an alternative method for a few minutes and then try to breast-feed.
- **Change positions.** Try different breast-feeding positions. If your baby is congested, place him or her in an upright position during breast-feeding.
- **Deal with distractions.** Try feeding your baby in a dark, quiet room with no distractions. Do not talk or watch TV while breast-feeding. Alternatively, turn your body so that your baby can face the activity. Let your baby play and nurse intermittently, if necessary.
- **Spend time cuddling.** Increase the amount of time you spend cuddling, stroking and soothing your baby. Take a dimly lit warm bath with your baby. Skin-to-skin contact between you and your baby can help re-establish trust.
- **Evaluate changes in your routine.** Think about any changes in your routine that might be upsetting your baby. Are you experiencing stress? Are you taking any new medications or using any new products? Has your diet changed? Could you be pregnant? Avoid using perfume, fragranced soap, lotion or deodorant around your breasts. Focus on taking care of yourself.

If you continue to have problems with breast-feeding for more than a few days or you are concerned that your baby is not getting enough nutrition, consult your baby's doctor.

Click here for a Patient Education Handout for the mother on [Breastfeeding and Teething](#).

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