



CHARTING THE FUTURE™

The Lactation Center of Lancaster County

Revised 2020

'Nursing Strikes' or Refusing the Breast

Sometimes a baby will refuse to breastfeed. A nursing strike can be one feeding or 12 hours. Whatever the reason for the refusal, do not panic. This is usually temporary. Be patient and continue to offer the breast to the baby.

Some things to check and try are:

- Is there any soap, oil, powder or deodorant on the breast?
- Use a different position. If the baby is feeding on one side and refusing the other side, slide the baby's body over to the other side keeping the body in the same position.
- Are you tense, tired, irritable or upset? Some babies are very sensitive to your emotions. Take a deep breath and relax before offering the breast.
- Are you sure the baby is hungry? Some babies will refuse to eat if they have to burp, have gas or a belly ache. Try other comfort measures first and then try to latch again.
- If the baby is frantically hungry? This may happen when the baby sleeps longer than usual. Heat and massage the breast before latch. Wet the nipple or put a drop of water onto the breast which may help the baby to latch and suck.
- Check the nipple for flatness or tighter tissue at the base of the nipple. This often occurs when your second milk comes in, during engorgement or a longer period of time between feedings. Hand shape the nipple and/or stimulate the tissue then attempt to latch. You may also pump for 15-30 seconds to erect the nipple then immediately latch.
- Is the baby over stimulated? Try feeding the baby in a quiet room. Swaddle the baby, hold skin-to-skin until calmer.
- Does the baby have a stuffy nose or ear infection? Gently clear the nose before latch. Positioning the baby in a sitting or more upright position at the breast will relieve pressure in the ear.
- Is the baby teething? Rub the gums with your finger or try a teething ring before latching. Hand express or pump until let down and then latch the baby.
- Do you have your menstrual period? Some babies are a little fussier the first day or two. Your milk quality or supply are unaffected.
- Is the baby getting a lot of bottles? Is the baby taking the bottle too fast and now wants mom to let-down faster. Avoid giving in. Continue to calm the baby and offer the breast. Stop all bottles for 1-2 days. Review paced bottle feeding with care givers.
- If the baby consistently refuses one breast despite all efforts, have your OB/GYN or PCP check the breast.
- If necessary, pump your breasts and give your milk to the baby until he starts to latch again.

Call 717-740-5423 for questions, concerns or help..