

Lying down may help breastfeeding

Breastfeeding newborn babies lying down may boost the chances of success, UK research suggests.

A study of 40 mothers breastfeeding in different positions found that babies' natural reflexes kicked in more easily when the mothers were lying down.

The position seemed to trigger primitive reflexes usually seen in young mammals, the Royal College of Nursing conference heard.

Many women struggle with breastfeeding and give up after a few weeks.

Dr Suzanne Colson, senior midwifery lecturer at Canterbury Christ Church University, advises women on a technique called biological nurturing where the mother lies down and lets the baby lie on its tummy on top of her.

When mothers were lying flat or semi-reclined, babies could find the breast easier and in many cases attach themselves and feed whilst asleep

Dr Suzanne Colson

To look at whether this technique promotes feeding reflexes in the baby, she video-taped 40 women breastfeeding in a sitting-up position and lying down or reclining in the first month of life.

She spotted 17 reflexes in babies when they were breastfed lying down, including reflexes normally associated with other mammals who feed their babies in this way.

Breastfeeding in a sitting-up position only promoted the three normally seen reflexes - rooting, latching and sucking.

Mothers who breastfed lying down seemed to have more success and, although the majority of women in the study had initially reported problems with breastfeeding, after using the technique all the women continued breastfeeding.

Primitive reflexes

Dr Colson said the current study could not prove the technique was more successful than the standard sitting-up position, but it challenged the view that the "correct way" to breastfeed is sitting bolt upright or lying on your side.

"I found that mothers who breastfed their infants semi-reclined or flat-lying (as opposed to side-lying), in positions that mirrored the feeding positions of other mammals, had the greatest success.

"When mothers were lying flat or semi-reclined, babies could find the breast easier and in many cases attach themselves and feed whilst asleep.

"The research suggests that babies when they are on their tummy display these primitive reflexes, head bobbing in particular, that is seen in other mammals who are abdominal feeders."

She advised mothers to do what feels comfortable.

Dr Peter Carter, general secretary of the Royal College of Nursing, said: "For many new mothers breastfeeding can be difficult and challenging. Not being able to do something which is supposed to be as simple and as natural as feeding their own child can leave many new mothers feeling disappointed and let down.

"By challenging conventional breastfeeding positions this new research could go a long way to helping those mothers who are experiencing difficulties feeding their infants by suggesting other easy-to-adopt positions."

Mr Pat O'Brien, consultant in obstetrics and gynaecology at University College London and spokesperson for the Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, said it would be useful for women to know they can try different positions.

"From a health point of view, there's no reason they couldn't try breastfeeding in that position and we welcome any research that might improve the chances of success.

"Maybe women just have to experiment and find a position that suits them best."

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