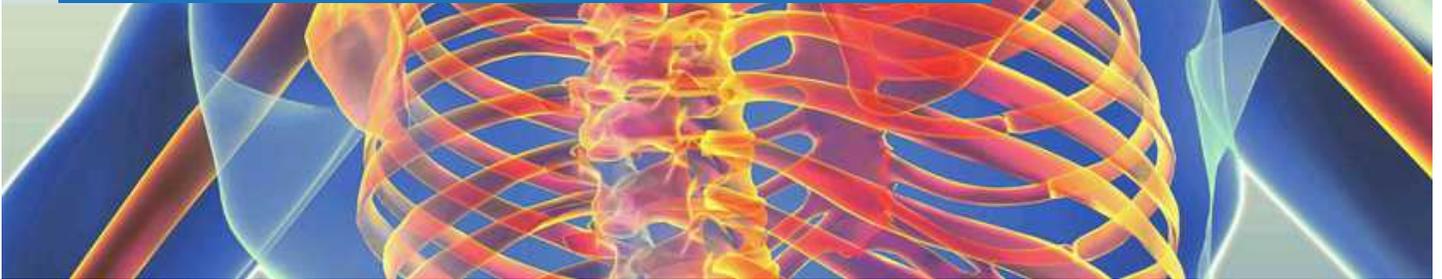


LATCHING AND SUCKING PROBLEMS

By: Dr Paul Bell



IDENTIFYING FEEDING ISSUES

There are a number of reasons that difficulties with latching and breast feeding may arise. These range from structural problems with the babies tongue or jaw, to milk production and flow issues with mum (please remember if you are experiencing milk production/flow issues, there is a lot that can be done to help as well). Some of the things you may experience if you are having issues: Baby will not latch, does not have a strong latch and cannot or will not hold the latch for long. Baby bites using gums instead of latching with lips and tongue (very obvious because it hurts you.) Very irritable during the feed.

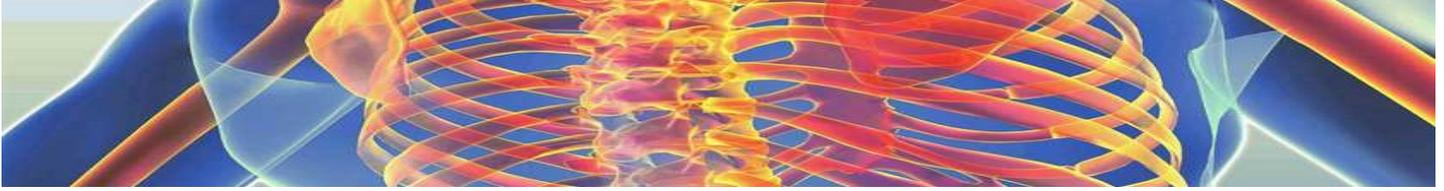
Often within the osteopathic clinic we see more functional problems with feeding. So when examining a baby with latching and feeding problems we often think in terms of:

Alignment

Is the baby's head and neck symmetrical Torticollis (misalignment) not only affects the neck, it may also create an uneven pull and positioning of the head, face and specifically the jaw. This can make the feeding position uncomfortable for the baby and affect the nerve supply to the jaw muscles.

“Often within the osteopathic clinic we see more functional problems with feeding. So when examining a baby with latching and feeding problems we often think in terms of alignment, position, movement and strength”





Position

Is the jaw position correct? It is normal for a baby's mandible (lower jaw) to sit slightly back in relation to the maxilla (upper jaw). However this position can sometimes be exaggerated, this is often triggered by the position of the baby in the womb and can be compounded by torticollis.

Movement

Can the mandible and tongue move forward sufficiently? This is important to allow the baby to latch but can be restricted if there is excessive muscle and fascial tension around the baby's face and neck. Tongue tie will also cause this problem and it is important to exclude this as a cause as soon as possible. Is the baby able to extend the cervical spine (neck) and head enough? For the baby to comfortably breastfeed they need to be able to tilt the head backwards. This is sometimes restricted or uncomfortable and is usually due to excessive soft tissue tension in these regions.

Strength

Do the tongue and jaw muscles have sufficient strength to initiate and maintain the latch? If there are difficulties with the latching process initially then the necessary reflex and muscle strength for latching may not develop sufficiently. This problem is often easily overcome once the underlying issues have been addressed and with some feeding retraining.

All of the issues identified above can be addressed with the assistance of a lactation consultant and within the osteopathic clinic, utilising very gentle treatment approaches. If you are unsure please consult with your lactation specialist, paediatrician or osteopath for further advice.

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