



Quick Tips for the Most
Common Nursing Challenges

BREASTFEEDING SOLUTIONS

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Distributed in Canada by Raincoast Books

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New Harbinger Publications, Inc.
5674 Shattuck Avenue
Oakland, CA 94609
www.newharbinger.com

Cover design by Amy Shoup
Acquired by Tesilya Hanauer
Edited by Marisa Solis

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data on file

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Problem 11: Your baby is teething and has bitten you.

Many mothers are warned to wean before baby's first tooth appears. However, many babies never bite, and those who bite once usually never bite again. Keep in mind that while baby is actively nursing, she can't bite, because her tongue covers her lower gum. It may also help to know that nipple pain caused by a teething baby will pass as her teeth erupt. Some teething babies bear down, chew on the nipple (pressure feels good on sore, swollen gums), or bite. The following strategies may help you prevent or ease the pain from both teething and biting.

Myth: You should wean before your baby gets teeth.

Reality: Many babies never bite, and nearly all of those who do can be taught not to. Most babies cut their first teeth between eight and twelve months (and some much earlier—some are born with teeth!). Since breastfeeding (with solid foods added at six months) is recommended for a minimum of one year, don't wean simply because you fear a tooth is coming in.

Use Cold to Numb Baby's Gums Before Breastfeeding

If baby's gums are numb, she is less likely to bear down or chew on you to ease her discomfort. To numb her gums, before offering the breast give baby something cold to chew on, such as:

- A cold, wet washcloth

- A refrigerated teething toy
- A frozen food such as a bagel or frozen peas, if baby has started solids

Consult with your baby's health care provider before using an over-the-counter teething preparation to numb her gums. These products may also numb baby's tongue (and your breast!), making breastfeeding difficult.

Learn How to Discourage Biting

Most mothers' first reaction to the baby bearing down on or biting the nipple is to startle and pull baby off the breast. After this reaction, most babies never bite again. But if a baby does bite again, try to stay calm. Pulling baby off the breast with her teeth clamped down can cause more damage than the bite itself.

The following strategies may help discourage a persistent biter.

- **Stop the feeding.** Remove the temptation for baby to make you jump.
- **Offer something else to bite on.** A teething ring, toy, or anything acceptable to bite can suffice.
- **Set baby quickly on the floor.** This gives the message that biting brings negative consequences. After a few seconds of distress, comfort baby.
- **Keep a finger near baby's mouth ready to break the suction.** Some distractible babies try to turn and look with the nipple still in their mouth. If you respond

consistently by breaking the suction, baby will learn quickly that turning away means losing the nipple.

- **Make sure baby latches deeply.** Being well onto the breast triggers active suckling and lessens the odds of biting.

Try to Reduce Your Discomfort

While experimenting with strategies to discourage bearing down or biting, try the following to reduce your pain.

- **Take pain medication** such as ibuprofen (which also reduces inflammation) or another analgesia that your health care provider recommends.
- **Offer your less-sore breast first**, and then switch to the other after your milk is flowing. Most mothers find breastfeeding less painful after their milk lets down.
- **Try varying feeding positions** so that one area is not consistently traumatized.
- **Use ultrapurified lanolin or hydrogel pads** to reduce pain.
- **Take a break from breastfeeding and pumping** to let your nipples heal.

If your nipples are severely damaged, you may prefer to pump your breasts and feed your baby by cup or bottle until your nipples heal a bit. Some mothers find that pumping hurts less than breastfeeding. Just remember to drain your breasts at least six times a day to prevent painful breast fullness and provide milk for your baby.

If These Strategies Don't Work

If your baby has been biting persistently, try the following strategies:

- **Give baby your complete attention during breastfeeding.** Eye contact, stroking, and talking decrease the odds that baby will bite to get your attention.
- **Learn to recognize the end of a feeding.** Most biting occurs when baby loses interest in breastfeeding. You may notice, for example, that tension develops in baby's jaw before she bites down. When you see this sign, you can break the suction and take her off before she bites.
- **Don't pressure a disinterested baby to breastfeed.** If baby pushes you away, offer the breast again later.
- **Remove a sleeping baby who's no longer actively suckling.** To do this, gently insert your finger between baby's gums to release the nipple. If baby bites, she'll bite the finger instead of your breast.
- **Keep your milk production abundant.** Some babies bite when they are frustrated by too little milk.
- **Note behaviors that lead to biting.** Some babies bite when teased or when you raise your voice to older siblings. Notice what happens before baby bites. Knowing the trigger may help you prevent future biting.
- **Keep breastfeeding relaxed and positive.** Some babies bite when mother is tense. If you feel frazzled, try deep

breathing, listening to relaxing music, or breastfeeding while lying down or in a darkened room.

- **Give praise when baby doesn't bite.** Say “Thank you” and “good baby” when she is gentle at the breast. Smiles, hugs, and kisses are loving ways to help teach baby to breastfeed comfortably.

Baby needs to learn what to do with new teeth while breastfeeding. Babies don't understand that biting causes pain. They don't bite because of “meanness.” Breastfeeding babies learn to associate their mother with feelings of security and comfort, as well as relief from hunger. When these positive associations are suddenly disrupted by baby's biting, baby should learn quickly not to do it again.



As a *busy mom*, you probably don't have time to read long-winded books and manuals. ***Breastfeeding Solutions*** is the perfect book for any new mother who wants fast solutions to common breastfeeding problems.

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