Facilitating Infant Competence: Hand Use During Latch

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Sparling 1999 fetal hand movements are non-random

Newborns bring hands to face (Kurjak)

Fetal swallowing is preceded by hand to face or mouth

von Hofsten – functional reaching

Von Hofsten – prefunctional reaching
At breast, babies use hands to:
- Communicate
- Orient
- Stimulate – oxytocin release (Matthieson)
- Calm
- Stabilize
- Support movement (crawl)
- Shape/move breast
Maternal contact improves skill
The more hand-breast-mouth movements, the faster newborns found the breast

Widstrom et al 2011
Newborn behaviour to locate the breast when skin-to-skin: a possible method for enabling early self-regulation
Acta Paed 100 (1) pp. 79-85

Synthetic oxytocin during labor interferes...

Bell 2013 Early Human Development
• reduced hand to mouth movements in first hour
• Reduces organized pre-feeding behaviors
Orienting and calming

Pushing away from breast to visualize nipple

Using touch and sight together (tactile and visual orienting)

Place-holding

Stability from gravity (biological nurturing)

Moving breast

Moving breast and stabilizing body position
Interference with baby’s hands can cause disorganization & confusion

This baby began refusing to bf...

Trapping arms and mittens interfere

The “perfect” picture

The baby has full access to the breast with his hands, face touching the breast

Pillow lifts baby above nipple height
Prechtl – pressure to lower lip causes head flexion.

...and pressure to philtrum causes maximal gape and head extension.

Shortcut positioning: chin to breast, nipple to philtrum, hands hug breast.

Hands in visual field van der Meer

Stabilizing
In upright positions, hold baby close.

Avoid getting between breast and baby.

Full body contact, hip flexion.

Using breast shaping.
Denting breast with one finger

Tilting nipple bulges out base of areola (Glover)

The same principles apply whatever the position
If using upright maternal positions, hold baby against mom

Hands relax when baby is well supported and in contact (oriented)

Maintaining contact

Older babies use more visual searching

Manual searching when face does not contact breast
Tactile searching with hand and cheek

Limit tactile searching: allow baby to hug the breast, keep baby's face touching the breast

Limit tactile searching: “slide into home plate”

If nipples are sore, allow baby's face to touch breast first
Denting the breast to mound up a mouthful below the nipple.

Breaking out of a reflex loop
Cheek to breast above nipple
Have mom snuggle baby closer

Mom calms and supports baby
Summary

• Babies use hands constructively
• Teach mothers not to interfere with hands unless nipples very sore
• Limit tactile searching by keeping face in contact with breast
• “Short cut” latch – baby’s arms hug breast; snuggle chin to areola; let nipple rest on philtrum (under nose).

For more information:

Genna CW and Barak D
Facilitating Autonomous Infant Hand Use During Breastfeeding
Clinical Lactation 1(1) Fall 2010, p 15-20
http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/springer/clac
http://www.cwgenna.com/clinicalcornerpage.html