



Clinical. Lactation



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Editorial

I was recently editing a book on postpartum care, and the author sent an image that she wanted us to use in her breastfeeding chapter showing “a good latch.” After a careful review, I determined that it actually was not a good latch. The baby was too far from the breast and only her lips were touching. I knew we should not include that one, so I went to find a better image on one of the stock photo sites that I often use. I did a search for breastfeeding photos and indeed found some photos showing a good latch. What concerned me, however, was the high number of photos with really poor, painful-looking latch.

This is a bigger deal than at first it might appear. Art directors and graphic designers go to these sites looking for photos to use on flyers, handouts, advertisements, and websites. They are looking for photos with good composition, that are attractive,

and that fit into the space they are looking to fill. With rare exception, they are not technical experts and may have no idea whether an image is presenting a poor latch.

Use of poor images becomes a problem for our new mothers because these images tend to show up everywhere. Mothers absorb this information with their right brain and do not critically evaluate it. These poor images become part of mothers’ “body memory” about breastfeeding. Given that, is it any wonder that so many of our mothers have nipple pain—and think that it is normal? Why wouldn’t they? It’s become part of the postpartum culture.

I would like to do is show you a few of these images (Figures 1–8) and then suggest what you can do to protect mothers in your community.

Figure 1. This one hurts just to look out. If you need a perfect picture of nipple feeding, this is it. I’m not surprised that they are not showing the mother’s face.



Figure 2. Another one with a shallow latch (note the position of the bottom lip). I suspect this one is also quite painful for the mother.



Figure 3. There are a few problems here: shallow latch, bottom lip tucked in, and baby on her back with her head turned. I would anticipate problems with nipple pain, and possibly, milk supply/infant weight gain.



Figure 4. Another picture with a baby on her back. Please note that this is a bottle-feeding position. Her head is turned, and her latch looks pretty shallow. She also looks stressed. The mother might be as well.



Figure 5. This one looks better, although we cannot see the bottom lip. The baby does not appear stressed and is in a state of quiet alertness. That's what we like to see.



Figure 6. This is another lovely photo of decent latch, and the mother and baby enjoying each other. The baby certainly appears happy.



What You Can Do

So what should we do, given the ubiquitous nature of pictures showing poor breastfeeding positioning? Writing to the stock photo sites is unlikely to get you very far. They have a right to post these pictures, and the photographers have a right to take them. Are you helpless, then? Absolutely not! I would recommend a couple of approaches.

1. If you work with an organization that creates web content, flyers, posters, and other materials, pay attention to what they are doing. Go introduce yourself to the artist or designer who is creating the materials. Find out what they need and offer alternatives. Stock sites, like Fotolia.com, will let

you download comp images, so they will cost you no money and will give you a chance to show some more appropriate images. You can even use this as an opportunity to educate your artist, showing the difference between a good and bad photo of latch.

2. And speaking of education, use these poor images to teach your mothers. Help them see good positioning, in all its variations, and poor positioning. Review this several times so that it becomes automatic for them and their partners. You can even use these to teach colleagues. One of the most enjoyable sessions I ever taught was with a group of pediatric residents. I brought my whole stack of photos and taught them what to look for. And then I would say, "What do

Figure 7. This latch looks a little shallow, but it is most likely fine. If it's not hurting the mother, we can leave it alone. The baby certainly isn't starving.



you need to ask next?" They would shout, "Does it hurt?" They were really engaged, and I think they retained the information much better than if I had stood there and lectured them.

By becoming aware of the images that mothers see, we can be proactive and teach our mothers what to look

Figure 8. Babies can have a good latch in lots of positions. Mother and baby both look happy, and it's nice to see a mother and baby in a laid-back position.



out for. We can also use the poor images as powerful teaching tools. But first, we must pay attention. Bit by bit, we can help turn the tide for the mothers we work for, and hopefully, create more accurate and helpful materials than much of what is currently out there. We must also remember that some of this material is produced by groups that want breastfeeding to fail.

Thanks for helping your mothers not to be taken in by the bottle-feeding culture.

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