



Standard 6: Nurse Frequently Day and Night and Avoid Schedules

Babies were designed to nurse many times per day. Human milk is low in fat and also digests quickly, requiring frequent nursing sessions. Milk production works according to supply and demand; the more you nurse, the more milk you make. There are women who cannot produce enough milk even when breastfeeding often due to insufficient breast tissue, hormonal imbalances, and relactation for adoptive nursing. However, these are rare situations; only 5% of women cannot physically breastfeed.

One physiological reason not to schedule feedings is that every woman has a different breast storage capacity. Women with a smaller breast storage capacity will end up nursing their baby more often if they follow their baby's lead. Storage capacity is not necessarily related to breast size.

Another reason not to schedule nursing is that you will not know when your baby needs your milk supply to increase during a growth spurt. If you have an older child, you know there are times when he needs more to eat, especially adolescent boys. They can go through periods of time when they are simply ravenous. After several days or even a week, it seems to pass and they are back to their normal eating habits. We, as adults, also desire more or less food sometimes due to exercise, sickness, stress, etc. Why would a baby be any different?

Several researchers have studied the effect of breastfeeding on fertility. One such researcher, Dr. James Wood of the University of Michigan's Population Studies Center, studied the Gainj people of New Guinea to determine the effect of breastfeeding on their childbirth rates. Gainj mothers tend to breastfeed their children frequently but in shorter spurts. The mothers in the study breastfed their babies on average every 24 minutes and their three year olds on average every 80 minutes. The interval between nursings very slowly lengthened, and this was found to be significant for delaying the return of fertility. The Gainj people have an average family size of 4.3 children, and an average of 44 months between births. They do not practice contraception or abortion (*The Seven Standards of Ecological Breastfeeding*, p. 46).

Also, Konner and Worthman studied the !Kung tribe in southern Africa. The mothers had an average of 44 months between births and did not practice contraception. The !Kung mothers keep their children under two years old close to them during the day and night, and the children nurse often – a few times per hour for just a few minutes at a time. The frequency of suckling seems to be the key to their natural infertility, also (*The Seven Standards of Ecological Breastfeeding*, p. 47).

Another researcher, Dr. R.V. Short, studied the !Kung in southern Africa and a Papua New Guinea tribe and theorized that it is the biochemical composition of human breast milk - low in fat, protein and dry matter - that helps explain the frequency of a child's suckling. He noted that gorillas suckle several times per hour, sleep with their babies, and have four to five year birth

intervals just like the other tribes mentioned. He also states that it is the frequency of breastfeeding that is most important in the natural infertility of breastfeeding. (*The Seven Standards of Ecological Breastfeeding*, p. 47).

Lastly, Dr. H. William Taylor studied a group of American mothers who breastfed similarly to the above stated tribes; their average time of natural infertility was 14 months. He found that the mothers who nursed their babies for less time per session but more often tended to ovulate later than those who nursed for longer sessions but less frequently (*The Seven Standards of Ecological Breastfeeding*, p. 47). All of the above explains the subtitle of Sheila Kippley's book I've been referencing – The Frequency Factor.