

Aeroflow Breastpumps

How Does Stress Impact Breastfeeding?

Being a new parent can be an exciting and at times, an overwhelming experience. Meeting your breastfeeding goals, taking care of your baby and making time for yourself can all be new stressors in your life. How does stress impact your breastfeeding experience?

Cortisol and Breast Milk

The hormone cortisol helps with your body's stress response, keeps your immune system running strong, and helps to control your blood pressure, blood glucose and ability to sleep. When under a stressful situation, the body makes more cortisol. Having higher than normal cortisol levels on a consistent basis can lead to health problems. Cortisol has been found in breast milk of mothers experiencing higher levels of stress, and led to more crying and fussiness in their babies.¹ Newer research has shown there is no long term relationship between breast milk cortisol and how much a baby cries or is fussy.² Stress has been found to affect the calorie level and fat content of human milk.¹ However, breastfeeding women have been found to have decreased levels of cortisol and other hormones released during stressful times than non-breastfeeding women. The key thing to remember is even if you are feeling stressed, please know your milk is going to provide the nutrition your baby needs. As a new parent, it is important to recognize and give yourself grace during this time and seek out the support you need to help your mental health.

Stress and Breast Milk Supply

For some breastfeeding mothers, stress may increase the hormone prolactin that is responsible for the production of breast milk, while others may see their breast milk supply decrease.³ Breastfeeding releases a hormone called oxytocin. When your baby breastfeeds, oxytocin signals your breasts to release milk. Oxytocin has been shown to decrease the stress response and help breastfeeding mothers feel more relaxed.^{3 4}

Take Care of Yourself

We hear about the importance of self-care everywhere, and it is more than just a word. If you do not take care of yourself, you cannot take care of others. Finding ways to give yourself a break during your breastfeeding journey is very important. Say yes to help when trusted friends or family members offer to help with chores, meal preparation, watching your baby for

a few minutes or just coming over for a needed visit and vent session. When your baby sleeps, find things that provide you rest as well. Try a few of these ideas:

- Listen to favorite music or podcast
- Dance around the house
- Spend time on a favorite hobby
- Take a bath or a shower
- Call or message a friend
- Journal your feelings
- Join a breastfeeding support group
- Watch a TV show or movie
- Read a book
- Use a relaxation app
- Yoga at home or in studio
- Go outside - walk around the block
- Grab lunch with a loved one

This is also an important time to avoid negative coping mechanisms such as criticizing yourself, eating too much or too little, drinking alcohol, smoking or vaping, yelling at your family members, and avoiding friends. Many new parents feel overwhelmed, have trouble sleeping, or feel sad - these feelings often go away within a few days or a week, and are due to your hormones returning to normal after delivery and starting breastfeeding.⁵ If feelings do not subside, please seek out the support of a trusted healthcare provider. Research has found higher levels of support from healthcare providers leads to longer duration of breastfeeding and lower levels of depressive symptoms.^{6,7}

What If I Have Questions?

If you are interested in learning more, these Aeroflow classes expand on some of the topics discussed above:

- Ultimate Breastfeeding Prep
- It Takes a Village

To register for these classes, log into your portal or click [here](#).

Want More Info?

For a directory of Aeroflow's other Care Guides offering information on pregnancy, baby care, and more, browse our comprehensive list of titles:

<https://www.hersourcehealth.com/aeroflow-care-guides/>

References:

1. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34078999/>
2. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6120523/>
3. <https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/bfm.2016.0052>
4. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/8041543/>

5. <https://www.womenshealth.gov/mental-health/mental-health-conditions/postpartum-depression>
6. <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article-abstract/112/1/108/63401/Clinician-Support-and-Psychosocial-Risk-Factors?redirectedFrom=fulltext>
7. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36098279/>