

# How Too Much Information about Breastfeeding May Cause Some Problems for You and Your Baby

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In modern Western cultures, mothers have more information about breastfeeding than any time in human history. Unfortunately, most of this is information for the left side of your brain, which is fine for lots of tasks. But too much left-brained information can make you anxious about breastfeeding. Breastfeeding is a right-brained activity. What do we mean by that? Think of left-brained instructions as head knowledge. Right-brained learning yields heart or body knowledge. To illustrate the difference, think about riding a bike. Did you learn by reading about it? Talking in a class? Talking to other people about it? Or did you learn by just getting on a bike and doing it?

## The Right-Brained Dance of Breastfeeding

Mothers and babies have physiological responses that draw them to each other, that encourage them to look at each other, touch each other, and interact. Much of this behavior is guided by the right side of the brain. This is the side that has to do with affect or emotion.

A problem with the heavily left-brained, instructionally oriented way that many mothers learn to breastfeed is that it doesn't allow mother and baby to take advantage of their natural responses. So much breastfeeding education focuses on all the things mother must do to get the baby to breastfeed, which ignores the baby's role. That type of instruction can be helpful to solve a particular problem, but it can be a definite drawback when one technique or strategy is applied to all mothers. It also discourages mothers and babies from using their hardwiring. Worse still, this kind of education can encourage them to tune out their natural responses or to violate their instincts. It can be upsetting for all who are involved, sometimes creating a crisis where none existed before. Another problem with highly instructionalized left-brained approaches is that they can leave some mothers feeling incompetent because it feels as if there are ten thousand things they need to remember.

A different way to think about this is to consider how mothers throughout human history managed to breastfeed without all of the information we have now. When breastfeeding was the norm, girls learned about breastfeeding as they were growing up by seeing women actually doing it. Dr. Peter Hartmann, a well-known breastfeeding researcher, makes this point well. He asked a young Australian Aboriginal mother, "When did you learn about breastfeeding?" She answered, "I have always known how to breastfeed."

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