



## **Biological Nurturing: a new neurobehavioural approach to breastfeeding initiation**

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### **Biography**

Suzanne Colson PhD, MSc, BA, RGN, RM is an independent midwifery lecturer, co-founder of The Nurturing Project, the Royal College of Nursing Akinsanya Scholar 2007 and an honorary Senior Lecturer at Canterbury Christ Church University.

### **Short description of the lecture**

This study is the first to describe a range of semi-reclined maternal postures interacting with neonatal positions, releasing behaviours and reflexes stimulating breastfeeding. The presentation will project compelling visual data illustrating the mechanisms. Findings suggest that breastfeeding initiation is innate for both mother and baby, not learned, thus challenging the routine skills-teaching central to breastfeeding support.

### **Keywords**

biological nurturing; breastfeeding positions, breastfeeding behaviours, self attachment

### **Abstract**

Although over three-quarters of mothers initiate breastfeeding in the UK, by six weeks, 37% of them have stopped; only 1% of those who stop plan to wean their babies to the bottle. The most common reason causing this early unintended breastfeeding cessation during the first week is 'latch refusal or baby will not suck'. Rooting and sucking have been studied extensively as feeding stimulants but little is known about the role other primitive neonatal reflexes (PNRs) might play to aid latch and sustain milk transfer.

Methods: PNRs observed during one feeding session videotaped in the first postnatal month (either in hospital or at home) were described and compared investigating whether certain feeding behaviours and positions, collectively termed Biological Nurturing (BN) are associated with the release of those reflexes pivotal in establishing breastfeeding. 40 breastfed healthy term mother/baby pairs were recruited using quota sampling to stratify term gestational age.

Findings: 20 PNRs were described, validated and classified into 4 types (endogenous, motor, rhythmic and anti-gravity) and 2 functional clusters (finding/latching, milk transfer) either stimulating or hindering feeding. Significantly more PNRs were observed as stimulants in semi-reclined BN postures than when mothers were upright or side-lying ( $p = <0.0005$ ).

Discussion: This study is the first to describe a range of semi-reclined maternal postures interacting with neonatal positions, releasing maternal instinctual behaviours and PNRs stimulating



breastfeeding. Compelling visual data here suggest that when the newborn initiates breastfeeding in full ventral positions, like some other animals, anti-gravity reflexes are released aiding latch and sustaining milk transfer.

Conclusion: Challenging aspects of current breastfeeding support, this work offers a robust neurological framework to underpin breastfeeding initiation. The presentation will summarise the study and project video clips comparing the positional mechanisms.

### Key Publications

Colson S. (2008) Biological Nurturing – Laid-Back Breastfeeding DVD available on line at [www.biologicalnurturing.com](http://www.biologicalnurturing.com)

Colson S. (2008) Bringing Nature to the Fore *The Practising Midwife* 11(10) 14-19.

Colson S.D. Meek J. & Hawdon JM. (2008) Optimal Positions triggering primitive neonatal reflexes stimulating breastfeeding *Early Hum Dev.* 84(7):441 – 449. on line at <http://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S0378378207002423>

Colson S. (2007a) Biological Nurturing, a non-prescriptive recipe for breastfeeding (1) *The Practising Midwife.* 10 (9): 42-8.

Colson S. (2007b) Biological Nurturing: The physiology of lactation revisited (2) *The Practising Midwife.* 10 (10): 14-19.

Colson, S. (2005a) Maternal breastfeeding positions, have we got it right? (1) *The Practising Midwife.* 8 (10): 24-27.

Colson S. (2005b) Maternal breastfeeding positions, have we got it right? (2) *The Practising Midwife.* 8 (11): 29-32.

Colson S. DeRooy L. & Hawdon J. (2003) Biological nurturing increases breastfeeding duration. *MIDIRS Midwifery Digest.* 13 (1): 92-97.

Colson S. (2003) White blood: dose benefits of human milk. *The Practising Midwife.* 6 (10):11-13.

Colson S. (2002) Womb to world: a metabolic perspective. *MidwiferyToday.* 46 (1): 12-17.