

Nursing Strikes



Nursing Strikes refer to a baby who was previously nursing but abruptly stops nursing.

Nursing strikes can be an incredibly frustrating experience. We have to use active management to protect the milk supply, detective work to figure out what has caused the baby to stop nursing, and creativity to coax the baby back to the breast. With younger infants, they are normally short lived, but with older infants and young toddlers, they can last for over a week or more, and it can be very stressful on the whole family.

Common Causes of Nursing Strikes:

- stuffy nose
- teething
- sore throat
- ear pain/infection
- bottle preference
- reaction to mother's response to biting
- stress related to sleep training
- family stress
- separation from nursing parent
- discomfort at the breast

Strategies to End the Nursing Strike:

- Identify the cause, and resolve the issues
- Lots of snuggles and supportive parenting
- Skin-to-skin contact
- Make the breast available but don't force anything
- Offer the breast to a sleeping baby
- Remove other options for baby to satisfy their need to suck, and offer feeds by cup.

My Personal Favorite Strategy to End the Nursing Strike:

Peer pressure! Babies love to mimic what they see, and jealousy is an emotion they are incredibly well acquainted with. Many nursing strikes can be ended by taking the baby to a breastfeeding support group or play group where older babies are openly nursing.

Sometimes, the act of seeing another baby nursing is enough to inspire the nursing-striker to happily come back to the breast.

The key to outlasting the nursing strike is to protect the milk supply during this time by pumping or hand expressing, so that at the resolution of the nursing strike there are not supply issues to contend with.