

# Breast feeding and sleep disorders

The link from a dentist's perspective. *by Dr. Susan Maples*

**I**t's estimated that 25 percent of kids suffer from some level of sleep disorder. That's a big deal considering lack of sleep is associated with a multitude of health concerns: significant behavioral problems, headaches, ADHD diagnosis, and learning disabilities. Also, the growth hormone is formed during sleep, so if your kiddo has disruptive sleep it may have an effect on his or her overall growth.

With many sleep disorders resulting from a narrowed airway—our eyes turn to a lack of breast suckling as a contributing factor.

Most new moms understand the advantages of breast milk. There's oodles of evidence that it helps babies defend against infections, prevent allergies, and protect against a number of chronic conditions.

But for a variety of reasons, including moms sharing the primary care giving

role with dads, grandparents, day care providers, etc., babies are often getting mom's milk from a bottle instead of directly from her breast. Does it matter?

Oh yes! The anatomic structure of a woman's nipple makes it more challenging for the baby to receive her milk than through a baby bottle nipple. Because baby has to work harder at mom's breast, it strengthens and conditions the tongue. In turn, a strong tongue pushes up and forward, naturally expanding the palate to make a resting place for itself. Without a strong tongue the palate remains narrow and "vaulted." Now where does the tongue rest? Low and back, sometimes blocking the airway during sleep.

To counteract this we often intervene with pre-orthodontic therapy called palatal expansion at 6+ years old. And sometimes with a tonsillectomy to gain more airway. If those fail we recommend a CPAP machine for obstructive sleep apnea.

What can you do to prevent sleep disordered breathing? If you are an expecting mom, try for more one-on-one breast-feeding time. If your baby has a failure to latch, consult with a lactation specialist and if there's a tongue or lip tie, she might refer for an almost painless laser procedure called a frenectomy. If your baby starts preferring a bottle to your breast, because it's easier to eat through the bottle nipple, don't give in. Put the bottle away for a while to get that one-on-one time.

And if you need to use a bottle, choose the Nuk; it has an exclusive on the most real-shaped bottle nipple. It also comes in graduated sizes which adjust the flow for growth and development.



*Dr. Maples is a dentist in Holt. She is also a speaker, health educator and author. Reach her at [susan@drsusanmaples.com](mailto:susan@drsusanmaples.com).*

**DR. SUSAN MAPLES & TEAM**  
very proudly continues to

**ROCK ON**  
in celebration of

**30 YEARS**  
SERVING  
OUR COMMUNITY

[www.drsusanmaples.com](http://www.drsusanmaples.com)