



STRUGGLING WITH NEWBORN FEEDING ISSUES?

You're not alone

Even Doctors Need a Support System for Newborn Feeding.

by Linda Barrett

If you are struggling with feeding your newborn baby and feeling pressure to be a “good mom,” you’re not alone. Even professionals have these feelings, as experienced by Dr. Rishita Jaju, a board-certified pediatric laser dentist.

Dr. Jaju’s Own Story

“The thing that made the lasting impact on me was when my own newborn son struggled to feed,” Dr. Jaju described. “I had already gone through a long IVF process,

and since I was of advanced maternal age (over 35), I knew there were health risk factors. In the hospital I felt very vulnerable, and wanted to be treated normally, like any new mother, and not be recognized as one of the doctors. I felt like I needed them to teach me Everything!”

Jaju’s son lost close to 10% of birth weight in the first 24 hours, which created concern for the doctors. An aggressive plan of frequent feeds, pumping and supplementation with formula was created in the hospital.



However, the pain of breastfeeding was excruciating and even though the milk was there, baby was not getting anything from breastfeeding. “I was struggling with pain and hormones that left me crying at the drop of a hat!” The elation of having a baby after the long struggle was drowned by the feeding troubles. She felt she was “failing at being a mom.”

She reached out for help from a lactation consultant, who was “fabulous at not only supporting me emotionally and mentally, but also helped me recognize that my baby, in fact, had a tongue tie.” Even though Dr. Jaju was an expert in pediatric dentistry, “I was so busy trying not to be the professional, and desperately wanting to be a ‘good mommy’, I wasn’t even looking at my own child!”

Once she realized her baby needed help, “I didn’t feel I was in the mental space to take care of him. She wanted another doctor to perform the frenectomy that would remove the tongue tie issue, but the one she trusted said, “I’m not doing it! I’m here for you, but you are the best for it!” So Jaju steeled herself to perform the procedure. “Through this experience I realized how hard it was to see your baby have a procedure done, and that emotion can actually get in the way of a rational thought process. I feel more empathetic towards other moms as a result. This experience has changed my life and my practice forever.”

In the end, the procedure went well and Jaju’s baby is a “growing, thriving, chatty little one now,” she said. “He definitely keeps me on my toes. My husband and I are trying to give him the same type of world view as we both have had. My son is now three and has traveled to 10 countries with us!”

Feeding Your Baby Should Be Enjoyable

“A baby’s feeding and breathing should be easy, and feeding your baby should be enjoyable,” Jaju stressed. “If you are seeing your baby having a hard time with feeding or breathing, if they are gasping for air, or

can’t coordinate a swallow, you should look to an expert for help. I encourage moms to feel empowered to look for help and ways to make feeding their baby comfortable.”

The newborn time should be joyful and a mom should have a supporting team of pediatrician, lactation consultant and other providers available. When there is an oral health or oral structural concern, mothers should be encouraged to reach out. “These experiences in the nearly-newborn and toddler phases are so important to overall growth and development,” Jaju said.

Unfortunately, in the current health care system, the focus is on discharge criteria for new mothers within 24 hours of birth, rather than supporting effective feeding skills. Once the baby goes home, it becomes difficult to focus on the mommy/baby pair as a dyad. The focus is placed just on weight gain, so the common solution is to offer formula rather than investigating a mother’s feeding concerns.

The tide is turning, and even if health care professionals are sometimes dismissive when evaluating for oral structure, tongue tie, lip tie or other issues, television shows in our general media like Call the Midwife and Royal Pains are calling attention to the problems and solutions, and normalizing them.

Comprehensive Care is Important

In her own practice at Smile Wonders, Jaju provides frenectomy and other laser dentistry procedures for infants and children. Conservative and safe protocols have always been a priority. “As a mommy dentist, I understand the importance of comprehensive care and collaborative services with other providers,” Jaju said. “We provide an age-appropriate customized approach with referrals to other team of providers such lactation consultants, oral motor functional-savvy Feeding Therapists, Infant massage specialists, and physical or occupational therapists as needed.”



Even though doctors are healthcare professionals, they're still as vulnerable as any new parent. "As I continue to see patients in our area, accomplished professionals, colleagues, diplomats and other leaders in their fields who going through a challenging newborn feeding journey, it can take me back to my own emotions again," she described. "I strive to be a trusted resource and provide a comprehensive approach to the baby's health rather than having tunnel vision of the benefits of a frenectomy procedure."

Dr. Jaju also specializes in caring for children with special needs, providing customized care appointments for children ages 0-14 years with medical and behavioral concerns, ADD, autism spectrum, Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy and other issues. "Many times parents of patients with special needs find me because their children are having feeding or speech difficulties."

Help is Available

If you are struggling with feeding your newborn, help is available. Contact a lactation consultant, schedule a virtual or in-person consultation with Dr. Jaju's office and get a detailed exam for your child. The doctors will review any current symptoms,

look at future considerations, and discuss any clinical oral findings, including tongue, lip, cheek, or jaw anatomy and their impact on function. Also discuss any other medical concerns. The overall health of your child is of the utmost importance.

About Dr. Jaju

Dr. Rishita Jaju is a Board Certified Pediatric Dentist who complete her dental education at the Harvard School of Dental Medicine, and received specialty training in Pediatric Dentistry at Children's National Medical Center in Washington, DC where she was appointed Chief Resident. She is the only pediatric dentist in the Mid-Atlantic region who has achieved Advanced Laser Proficiency Certification from the Academy of Laser Dentistry and a Breastfeeding Specialist Certification. She is the founding dentist of the Reston, VA-based Smile Wonders that specializes in infant oral health and feeding issues. ❖

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