



Courtesy of Michele Biagi

CST for *breastfeeding blues*

Breastfeeding can boost babies' intelligence; help prevent asthma; protect from infections and high blood pressure later in life; and reduce new mothers' stress levels, according to medical experts.

Brooke Biagi (above) overcame the breastfeeding blues with the help of CranioSacral Therapist Alison Hazelbaker.

With all these benefits and more, it's no wonder that many moms choose to breastfeed their infants. But what happens if the process is too problematic or painful to continue? Instead of turning to breast pumps or formula, some

new mothers are relying on CranioSacral Therapy (CST) to solve the breastfeeding blues.

The technique, pioneered by osteopathic physician John Upledger, is a hands-on method of evaluating and enhancing the craniosacral system, which consists of the membranes and cerebrospinal fluid that surround and protect the brain and spinal cord. Practitioners aim to release restrictions in the craniosacral system, using pressure about the weight of a nickel, to improve the functioning of the central nervous system and the body's overall ability to heal itself.

"I was willing to try anything," said Michelle Biagi, of Powell, Ohio, who suffered painful nipple compression from feeding her 3-month-old daughter, Brooke. "I wasn't willing to believe my [obstetrician], who said that not every baby can breastfeed."

Biagi began using a breast pump but continued to search for a solution that would allow Brooke to breastfeed naturally. A lactation consultant recommended that she see Alison Hazelbaker, a CranioSacral Therapist and lactation consultant in Columbus, Ohio.

Hazelbaker, an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant since

1985, began using CST as a primary modality in her practice after watching it work wonders on her own baby's problematic breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding difficulties may arise from a variety of factors, said Hazelbaker, such as misalignment, improper tongue placement, tongue thrusting or tight mouth, and can result in extreme pain for the mother, as well as insufficient calorie intake and irritability for the baby. Although CST does not solve all sucking dysfunctions, Hazelbaker said there are some, such as misalignment, which respond particularly well.

During a session, Hazelbaker performs CST on the infant, and improvements are almost immediately visible, she said, although it may take up to six sessions to completely solve the problem.

"After my third session is when I really started to notice a big difference," said Biagi. "As her suck changed, I was out of pain."

After years of such success stories, Hazelbaker decided to document her work in hope of spreading the word. She is now working to publish a 40-page study she conducted on a sample of 20 clients, called "Impact of CranioSacral Therapy on Sucking Dysfunction as Measured by the Neonatal Oral Motor Assessment Scale."

"In every case where the sucking dysfunction was due to misalignment, CranioSacral Therapy eliminated it," she said. "That's 100 percent of the time."

Biagi, too, is spreading the word to new moms about an alternative to breast pumps or formula for painful breastfeeding. She is writing an article about CST for a local new-mothers' newsletter.

"I truly believe CranioSacral Therapy was the only thing that got Brooke to breastfeed," said Biagi. "More moms should know about this."

—Brandi Schlossberg