



Dr. Nurul Husna M. Shukri

Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, University Putra

Nurul Husna is a senior lecturer at the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, University Putra Malaysia. She received her PhD in infant nutrition from University College London Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health, where her research project focused on mother-infant signalling during breastfeeding. She also has an MSc in Human Nutrition from Massey University, New Zealand where she was part of a research team investigating iodine status in pregnant and lactating women in New Zealand.

During her PhD, she conducted a randomised trial investigating the effectiveness of relaxation therapy in reducing maternal stress and the consequent effects on breast milk composition and infant outcomes. The project involved measuring macronutrient composition and bioactive components in breast milk and their

relation with infant behaviour and growth. In addition to the clinical perspective, she also applied an evolutionary approach to infant feeding by studying the mechanism of the 'tug-of-war' between mother and infant, and maternal investment strategy during lactation. The ultimate aim of her project was to provide a greater understanding of maternal-infant factors which influence the success of breastfeeding.

Nurul Husna is also a qualified breastfeeding counsellor in Malaysia, where she has been actively supporting and helping mothers to breastfeed. This has allowed her to understand the relevance of the environment and cultural practices of mothers during the antenatal and postpartum period.

The use of relaxation in breastfeeding

Maternal psychological state is recognised to be influential for lactation success, largely by affecting milk ejection. Thus, increased stress and anxiety can disrupt milk flow and, in the long term, affect milk synthesis. Conversely, milk ejection could possibly be improved by using relaxation therapy during breastfeeding. However, a recent systematic review investigating the effectiveness of relaxation therapy for breast milk composition and volume, and infant behaviour and growth found a limited number of studies. Relaxation therapy was shown to increase milk volume in mothers of pre-term infants in two randomised trials, but neither investigated effects on infant outcomes, and no study has yet been performed in mothers of full-term infants. To address this

research gap, a randomised controlled trial was conducted to test the effectiveness of relaxation therapy (guided imagery recording tape) on breastfeeding and infant outcomes in mothers of full-term infants. The study found that the intervention was effective in reducing maternal stress during lactation, favourably affecting breast milk composition (macronutrient and hormonal components) and positively influencing infant behaviour and growth. Given that relaxation tools such as the tape used in this study are generally simple to apply, these results suggest that further research is warranted to investigate potential applications of relaxation therapies for improving breastfeeding outcomes in different settings.