

# BREASTFEEDING AND POST NATAL DEPRESSION

By Lucia Leyfield, Breastfeeding Counsellor

Sore nipples and two hours sleep a night are enough to make anyone feel pretty low. In fact many mothers with sore or cracked nipples have periods of depression and tearfulness until there is a noted change during feeds. However breastfeeding is not a physiological contributor to post natal depression although at times it may feel other wise. Continued breastfeeding during a period of PND can benefit a mother in a number of ways:

- continued breastfeeding (as opposed to abrupt weaning) minimises the risk of mastitis, engorgement, breast discomfort etc. which can complicate a mother's treatment.
- breastfeeding stabilises hormonal imbalances. Since PND is affected by hormonal levels, stopping breastfeeding can be particularly overwhelming for a mother who is prone to depression.
- Stopping breastfeeding may be experienced as an emotional loss because for most women breastfeeding is more than a means of feeding a baby; it is also a way of giving and receiving love and comfort. For many women breastfeeding is one of the few positive things they alone can do for their baby even though they are going through a difficult time. To have this taken away means a mother may be left feeling useless and incompetent and interchangeable with any other caregiver detracting from the intimate bond between mother and child.

Breastfeeding and many types of anti-depressant medication are compatible. Your doctor should be able to talk through these with you. There is also a lot of information on the Breastfeeding network website: <http://breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/supporterline/antidepressants.php>.

Please feel free to call me on 01666 841 281 if you would like to talk about this or any other aspect of breastfeeding in complete confidentiality.