

Complementary & Alternative Medicine in Breastfeeding Therapy by Nikki Lee, RN, MS, IBCLC, ANLC, CST (Appl. Cert.), 2011, Amarillo, TX: Hale Publishing, LLC. ISBN: 978-0-9833075-5-6.

Complementary & Alternative Medicine in Breastfeeding Therapy by Nikki Lee is a “must have” for anyone working with mother-baby breastfeeding dyads, professional and peer support alike. In a field that is populated by a wide variety of professionals and passionate women who support other women, information about methods to support the breastfeeding dyad are rare beyond the basic types of baby holds to support milk transfer. Ms. Lee does an excellent job of reviewing the literature on alternative approaches such as feng shui, skin-to-skin, and touch, massage, acupuncture, chiropractic, craniosacral therapy, remedial co-bathing, homeopathy, and other clinical tips. She also creates a context for why these approaches are so important in the beginning, which was one of my favorite parts of this precious book.

Many advocates for complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) are aware of how mainstream medicine took hold in the 1900’s with the publication of the Flexnor report and the growth of medical schools and hospital use for birth. Lee reviews patterns of CAM use and basic research at the outset. The reader gets a sense of the reason why breastfeeding mothers and their support team need to turn to the methods she reviews as she paints a picture of safety and comfort for mom and baby. From the beginning, she shows how hospitals can have an environment that is not particularly comfortable for breastfeeding mothers, and counteracts that with a description of her “sanctuary” where she greets the stressed out mother. If there are problems with breastfeeding, the mom and baby dyad arrives at a professional’s office in distress. The conditions for successful therapy can begin with a comforting and healing environment.

Lee’s chapter, “Connecting the Dots between Birth and Breastfeeding,” is likewise very strong with its invitation to consider conditions in breastfeeding in the US today. The book reviews hospital birthing practices, and how they can interfere with breastfeeding. She states, “A mother’s confidence is like a bud; hospital procedures and practices can blight the bud so it does not bloom” (p.19). As a bodyworker who specializes in supporting breastfeeding, I often see how difficult births and multiple lactation consultations can be disruptive. Her review of birth statistics in hospitals is sobering. She also describes how certain birth interventions can influence the emotional state of the mother, which can in turn affect the breastfeeding relationship. As Lee moves to describe the CAM interventions, she introduces the Mother and Baby Friendly movements that are increasing in use today.

The chapters on each CAM method describe many uses and therapies. They cover special conditions that are useful, historical, scientific, and cultural references and how the modality can be helpful for breastfeeding. For example, in the chapter on touch and skin-to-skin, Lee reviews the history, importance, and use of touch therapies, and the science and research of skin-to-skin as a therapy for breastfeeding dyads. As she moves into describing massage, she goes over how it applies for mother, baby, and the relationship itself. The chapter lists several different kinds of massage modalities. In the chapter on acupuncture, Lee introduces how to find a reliable practitioner.

Perhaps the biggest chapter is on the use of craniosacral therapy, which is very important because many babies need bodywork to help with suck, swallow, and breath as it relates to compression and the cranium. Infant craniosacral therapy is very important as a modality to improve cranial nerve function, and decrease compression in the baby that might interfere with breastfeeding. It can positively affect conditions such as torticollis and plagiocephaly, and is

growing in popularity within the lactation world. As an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant and a craniosacral therapist, Lee is uniquely qualified to report on how this therapy is useful and important for breastfeeding. Here, she gives case studies on its application from her private practice and makes notes about how to find a practitioner.

Additional chapters describe home and clinical applications that are useful to the reader supporting breastfeeding and for parents. Remedial co-bathing is a wonderful approach not often introduced to mothers as a way to support their relationship with their baby. Lee outlines its use and gives directions, case studies, tips, and conditions for success, as well as support for the breastfeeding dyad. She states, “When a mother wants to breastfeed and can’t, she is not having much fun with her baby” (p.136). She further describes how even traditional lactation can discourage a mother who is suffering. She gives many tips for breastfeeding success. She completes the book with a chapter on homeopathy, and a chapter on further clinical tips.

This book is gentle but firm. It makes the case for support of the mother and baby. Readers can get inspired by the many kinds of CAM methods to try, and feel the support of the author and her love of mothers and babies.

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