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Clinics in Human Lactation 9: The Psychoneuroimmunology of Human Lactation – How Breastfeeding Protects Women’s Health Throughout The Lifespan

Maureen Groer, RN, PhD, and Kathleen Kendall-Tackett, PhD, IBCLC
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Tel: 806-376-9900; toll free 800-378-1317; fax 806-376-9901; URL: www.ibreastfeeding.com

Psychoneuroimmunology (PNI) is an emerging science that considers ways in which the human mind and the immune system influence each other. In other words, there may be something to “it’s all in your head.” The introduction emphasizes the multidisciplinary aspect of health, linking the “breastfeeding relationship, the psychobiology of the lactational state, and the biology of human milk” (p. 9) to PNI. The goal is to use the latest evidence to present “information on the science of PNI and apply it to the maternal-infant breastfeeding dyad” (p. 9).

Other than the first chapter on the basic concepts of lactation, the content of this information-dense monograph is written in a scientific tone and assumes that readers have a basic knowledge of life sciences (e. g., immunology, molecular and cell biology, anatomy of the nervous system). Chapter 2 gives an overview of the human stress response and chapter 3 introduces the reader to PNI and the immunology of pregnancy and postpartum period. The remaining chapters abound with abstracts of studies that link repeatedly the state of mind (e. g., stress and depression), inflammation, and diseases and relate this information to the protective role of breastfeeding. In the chapter on breastfeeding and immunity, the authors seize the opportunity to “turn the phrase” to “formula feeding increases health risks” (p. 79). The extensive bibliography is a researcher’s dream on this innovative topic.

A well-developed index would increase the usefulness of the rich text. Every term has only one reference page and could easily be deduced from the well-organized table of contents. Basic and well-known terms (e. g., sIgA, lactoferrin, pro- and anti-inflammatory) and specific terms that occur repeatedly (e. g., T-cells, C-reactive proteins, individual cytokines) are not included. Similarly, a list of the numerous acronyms and abbreviations would be helpful. Sometimes, the information is confusing (e. g., fibrinogen as an opsonin) or incorrect (e. g., describing an endotoxin as a protein, B cells secreting antigens). The text would also benefit from more numerous and larger illustrations and attention to details such as oft overlooked exponents (10^3 instead of 10^3 cells per ml) and other typos.

Despite these limitations, **The Psychoneuroimmunology of Human Lactation** deserves to be read, and more than once. Every pass reveals information not picked up in the previous reading. It contains a goldmine of information that will be invaluable in caring for breastfeeding dyads.

Nicole J Bernshaw, MSc, IBCLC
Salt Lake City, Utah USA