

AMS

Original Message
From: Nicole Green [mailto:nicolegreen@pcc.org.au]
Sent: Tuesday, 16 January 2007 10:17
To: Committee, MAA (PDF)
Subject: Breastfeeding journey

I am 27 years old and I am the mother of two young girls, 2.5yrs and 1yr. My breastfeeding experience has been quite different with them both.

When I was pregnant with my first child I attended antenatal classes at my local hospital in Campbelltown, NSW. The midwife facilitating the course gave me plenty of information about the benefits of breastfeeding vs formula feeding. Having this information well before giving birth gave me the opportunity to weigh up my options objectively and decide that I was going to give it my all when it came time to attempt breastfeeding my baby.

The benefits that convinced me to breastfeed were:

- Breastmilk is great for a baby's immune system, helping to keep babies healthy and reducing the likelihood of asthma and allergies.
- Breastmilk contains antibodies to help fight illness, a handy tool during flu season.
- It costs nothing to breastfeed
- Breastfeeding is convenient. No washing up, no sterilizing, no packing of bottles and other equipment. My baby's milk is always readily available.
- When my baby is a newborn and only awake for an hour at a time, no matter how many visitors there are, there's always a special half hour just for cuddles with mum while madam has a breastfeed. I don't have to share her at all - I have the food.
- I am special. Only I can feed my baby. I have a unique relationship with my baby because of that.

Once I had made up my mind to breastfeed I had to learn how to do it. That was the hard part. I had never held a new born baby before and it was awkward enough trying to hold this tiny little girl without dropping or breaking her. When it came time to position her in my arms and put my nipple in her mouth for the first time it was pure fumbling and I had no assistance. No-one in my family has breastfed their baby so my visitors were of no help in this regard and the midwives were busy. I made a few bumbling attempts at feeding her but I was overwhelmed with everyone watching me and I didn't know what I was doing so I thought "I'll try later".

The midwives at the hospital all had different techniques to help me get Lucinda attached properly to my breast. She was not sucking and I kept getting different advice on how to overcome that, particularly by stimulating different parts of her body. I remember one feed where it was a 3 person effort, with my mum, my husband and myself all trying to tickle different parts of Lucinda's body (ears, legs, arms, under her chin, feet, hands) to encourage her to suck. The midwives were helpful but busy. I would buzz for someone to help me attach Lucinda for a feed, that midwife would help me get her attached and sucking and then leave. Invariably as soon as the midwife would leave Lucinda would stop sucking and unattach herself, leaving me feeling like I was being a pest if I buzzed for more help and completely lost as to how I could attach this new baby without help. It was very overwhelming and I was extremely anxious at the time. It didn't help that the mother in the bed next to me had overheard two midwives in the nurses station joking about how a particular baby was crying so much because he wanted a refund - his mother didn't know what she was doing. I kept this in mind and was reluctant to ask for help too often. What I really needed was a midwife to stay with me for an entire feed just to make sure I was going ok. Or even a midwife who was reassuring and came back every couple of minutes to check on me. It was the general atmosphere I guess that put me off, I felt like I was being a pest to already overworked nurses, getting them to help me with something that seemed so easy when they were explaining it to me.

I was so overwhelmed being in a hospital environment, all I wanted to do was go home where I didn't feel like all of my "mistakes" were being noticed. I had given birth on Friday and was begging to go home on Sunday but Lucinda was losing too

much weight and I needed to learn how to breastfeed her better before the hospital was comfortable letting me go. By Monday I couldn't take it anymore I had to leave. Lucinda had lost exactly 10% of her birthweight but they agreed to let me go home. I promised I would be a regular at the baby clinic.

Lucinda was losing weight because I was scared to feed her. When she cried I would feed her as a last resort, scared of the pain I knew was coming while she fed. Lucinda would feed for a total of 45mins most times and the whole time was agony. I knew it shouldn't hurt but because I had never breastfed before I didn't know what it was supposed to feel like. I knew I was doing it wrong but I didn't know how to get it right. I was in so much pain I would be crying while attaching Lucinda and during the entire feed. I once kicked the coffee table over from the pain, just to release the energy. I fed Lucinda every 5hrs, when I knew it should be more like every 3hrs. I just couldn't bring myself to do it. The books tell you to stop the feed if it still hurts after 45 seconds to avoid nipple damage, which is fine in theory. But factor in about 10 reattachments every feed and there's still an awful lot of potential for damage. Also factor in that your baby is screaming for food the entire time which is extremely stressful and the main reason I would give up trying to reattach and just suffered through a painful feed, telling myself that next feed I would be strong and ignore the crying until I got the attachment right. Of course I always gave in and thought to myself that at least she is sucking and getting milk. At least I am breastfeeding.

I called the ABA to ask for help, but there is only so much they can do over the phone. I had a lactation consultant come to my house to help me. She was affiliated with the local health service somehow and there was no fee. She was good, giving me confidence. I almost had it. She said my technique was good it was just a waiting game until everything clicked into place. I went to the local baby clinic to beg for more help when Lucinda was about 4 wks old. I had yet to have a pain-free feed. I had a couple of big cracks on my nipples and the pain was so bad that I couldn't face forward in the shower or dry my breasts with a towel. I was walking around topless at home to air out my nipples because even the slightest movement over my nipple of a bra or shirt would be agonising. It seemed too cruel that I was in this much pain and still expected to subject my nipples to further torture at every feed. I used a breastpump for a few days to see if things improved but I could see the crack in my nipple being stretched right out and made worse in the vacuum of the pump. A nurse from the baby clinic who was also a lactation nurse did a home visit and again said my technique was good. The problem was still that I didn't know what it SHOULD feel like.

Finally, I used a nipple shield just to see if it helped. Presto - my first pain free feed. Now that I knew what it was supposed to feel like I could stop the feed before any damage was done. I used the shield for a few days to give my nipples a break and it was pure bliss. I relied on the shield alot over the next week or so, but made sure if I was feeling brave I took it off so it didn't affect my supply or make Lucinda fussy.

In the end it was 7 weeks almost to the day before I had a good feed, with no pain from start to finish and no help from a nipple shield or another person. The feeling was electric. I could do it!!! I had never felt pride like this.

Once I had reached that seven week mark and gotten through that first pain free feed I never really had pain again. I had figured it out.

The biggest obstacle in learning to successfully breastfeed was asking for help. I was ok asking for help once but asking again and again and again made me feel stupid and completely incompetent. I wish it was made clearer that breastfeeding is not as simple as just popping a nipple into your newborns mouth.

When Lucinda was 9mths old I fell pregnant with her sister Lilli. Lucinda weaned herself off breastmilk at 10mths2weeks due to my pregnancy causing supply issues with my breastmilk. I was not ready to give up breastfeeding and felt so guilty, like I had stolen Lucinda's food by getting pregnant. Of course she didn't seem at all concerned.

When Lilli was born I was very confident. I knew what I was doing. I knew how to shape my nipple just so to get it into that tiny newborn mouth. I fed her constantly. Any little squawk and I would feed her. Lilli gained lots of weight but was always vomiting. I was feeding her every hour sometimes. I reduced her feeds to 3-4hourly and she has been fine ever since. Lilli is now 13mths old and still has 3-5 breastfeeds every 24hrs.

I love being a breastfeeding mum and even though Lilli is showing signs of disinterest, I plan to breastfeed her for at least another six months if she will let me. The sense of achievement I have from being able to do this is amazing. I am so proud of myself for sticking with it through that very painful period at the begining.

The only negative thing nowadays is from people nagging me to stop breastfeeding because Lilli is too old or that I should give my body a break. My thoughts on these types of comments are that Lilli is probably my last baby and I am enjoying feeding her while I still can. I'll get my body back as my own soon enough, I am happy to share my body with my baby for as long as she is happy to share it with me.

I hope my story helps with your inquiry.

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