



Let me start by saying prior to moving to Australia and meeting breastfeeding mothers, I was anti breastfeeding, pro formula! I am disappointed to say that I had no specific reason for this opinion; only that I grew up in South Africa and didn't know of many people who breastfed. I used to think that it was just a silly slogan 'breast is best' and that there wasn't much truth to it. I was bottle fed, as were my three siblings, and my sisters 5 children and I used to say, "we're all fine". Granted, we may be fine, but I now feel so strongly for breastfeeding and feel that I need to stand on a soapbox and claim this!

I have a five month old and I love breastfeeding him. It is incredibly rewarding as well as terribly convenient and the thrill that it gives me to know how nutritious it is for him is wonderful. Most of my close circle of friends breastfeed and I have learnt so much from them.

I should mention that I had a really tough time when I started out. Actually 11 weeks of painful blisters on one of my nipples. I found the ABA (Australian Breastfeeding Association) was a huge help and I have used their services on numerous occasions. I have been to their meetings, used their email service and help line which have all been extremely beneficial. One Saturday morning after hours of excruciating pain, I rang a lovely lady from the ABA who spent 40 minutes on the phone with me talking to me and making me feel better about myself. I took it as a personal failure that I couldn't breastfeed well.

I would recommend that if the government is not supporting the ABA financially then this should be looked in to. In my experience when I was finding it tough (which was often) I would read about the benefits of breast milk specifically in Robin Barker's book 'Baby Love'. My husband and mother were of great support, which made a huge difference. I also paid for a private lactation consultant to come to my home, which is extremely beneficial. I am yet to find out if my private health fund covers this fee. She was an amazing help and was happy for me to call her anytime.

There were some services who didn't help and if I were not as determined to persist would have contributed to my 'giving up'. I was not given much support in hospital and when I went back to them for help I was told my baby was too old (he was three weeks old!). They should tell mothers when they first leave hospital that there is a time limit. I understand that there must be some kind of cut off, but more funds should be placed in to the lactation services especially in the hospital where mothers need that help. Surely the benefits of breastfeeding in the long term will ease the financial burdens that obesity and diabetes cost the government.

My GP also let me down. She was abrupt and unsympathetic when I asked for her help. She told me to continue breastfeeding but made me feel inadequate for asking for help, which is disappointing from a health professional. I have since changed GPs.

I must add that if breastfeeding is causing extreme stress and anxiety then it may not be beneficial to the baby to have a mother at her wits end. It is such a difficult time as it is adjusting to life with a newborn, it would be wonderful if we could find some solution to encourage woman to persist, as it does get easier. I am living proof of this. Another help in my opinion would be for more women to talk about their problems. I thought it was going to be so easy! That was half my problem. I had been to breastfeeding classes before and after the birth of my son and seen my friend's breastfeed. I think that a part of the success of breastfeeding must be to find the balance of forewarning expectant mothers that there can be difficulties, but reassuring them that these will improve.

The development of milk banks must also be investigated. I recently read an article about milk banks in England and Canada and how mothers can give their milk (if they have an abundance!) and these deposits can be used for sick or premature babies in hospital who need that nutrition. This is probably a whole other debate, but it is worth looking in to.