

Submission no. 401AUTHORISED: 20/6/07 *B*

Subject: Inquiry into breastfeeding difficulties

Dear Ms Brown,

Thank you so much for asking us to provide you with information on our struggles with breastfeeding. I have had two children, the first breastfed for 12 months but the second is now 4 months old and has been bottle-fed since the first week (at least partly).

When my first child was born, I assumed I would have difficulties breastfeeding (and I did!) and also assumed that, if that were the case, I would put my child on the bottle. In the end, despite weeks of serious pain (when the attachment was not right) I persevered and breastfeeding worked. I should add that in those early weeks I felt a great deal of unstated pressure to breastfeed – from midwives, lactation consultants, friends who had successfully breastfed, and from myself. My baby also did a great deal of vomiting and crying (whether reflux, colic or a result of her egg & dairy intolerance, we never worked out) so it was a very, very difficult time for me. But in the end I really felt I had no choice but to breastfeed, because of her refusal of the bottle and because of my feelings of guilt and fear of doing her damage by putting her on formula.

When my second child was born, I had pretty much assumed that, since I had breastfed my daughter, I would be able to breastfeed my son, too. I remembered the difficulties I'd had before, but assumed I would get past them. However, when my son was born, he wasn't much interested in feeding for the first couple of days (tummy full of mucus) and when he did attach, he wouldn't gape wide enough, so I had nipple damage pretty much straight away. I must say the midwives and lactation consultants tried their best to help, & ended up putting me on a nipple shield to try to protect my nipples from further damage. This worked in the short-term, but over time my son would only attach with the shield in place, and it would slip around during the feed so I still ended up with cracks and blisters on both nipples, which were incredibly painful. My nipples were causing me discomfort all day and night, not just during feeds. I also ended up with lumps and while trying to clear one lump ended up with mastitis from another one on the other breast. After a couple of weeks of trying to feed 8 or 9 times a day with the shield, the pain and anxiety got too much for me and I started expressing and bottle-feeding to give my breasts a rest. This then led to bottle-feeding to help me stay one feed ahead with the expressing. I tried (with the help of lactation consultants) to get my son back on the breast but it was still painful and I ended up in tears most feeds.

With a 2-year-old to look after as well as my new baby (who was otherwise a dream – no vomiting, a calm little baby who slept beautifully) I was reaching the end of my tether with the expressing, feeding, sterilizing, etc. My mum (who breastfed my sister but bottle fed me and my brother) thought I was mad to persist so long (up to six weeks old or so) with the expressing, but again I was full of guilt for putting him on formula so early, even though he fed so easily and clearly was happy on it. All the same, I was exhausted and miserable and, when I made the decision to put him only on formula (at about 8 weeks) I experienced equal parts of guilt and relief. My son is now nearly 4 months old and still happy on the formula (and I still feel both guilty and happy that he's on it!!)

I have tried to think about what, if anything, could have made it easier for me to persist with breastfeeding. Unfortunately, for me, I think the only thing that could have got me through the early weeks would be to have a personal lactation consultant who could be consulted for every feed for a set period (say one week) to check and make sure that the posture, attachment, etc was correct and to advise on treatment of the inevitable cracks and blisters. I know that economically this is not feasible (even in the private hospital I stayed in, the two lactation consultants were run off their feet and some midwives did get their noses out of joint a bit when they found out you were on a "feeding plan" with the lactation consultant).

I hope the above is not too wordy! In summary, the problems I experienced were:

- Problems with attachment from early on, resulting in early damage to the nipples that could not be given sufficient time to heal;
- Further damage associated with the constant feeding of the early days (i.e. our first night home he had me up to feed him every two hours – impossible to concentrate on attachment when that is going on!)
- Difficulty accessing lactation consultants in hospital (they did their best but were very busy due to the maternity ward being full to capacity);

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- Midwives with differing advice/techniques and (in some cases) not much regard for the lactation consultants (the attitude being "I've been doing this for 30 years but just because I don't have the letters "LC" after my name no-one wants to talk to me", etc, etc. Not helpful to hear when your baby is only a couple of days old!!)
- Use of the nipple shield – helpful in the short-term but in the longer term, stopped baby from wanting to attach to the nipple itself (and when a baby is screaming, you'll use the shield if that's the only way to get him to feed!)
- Nipple shield size (too big/small??) may have been an issue re: slippage when it was used.
- Strong undercurrent of pressure to breastfeed from pretty much everyone involved (midwives, lactation consultants, publications, obstetrician, pediatrician, early childhood centre nurses) except other mums who've bottle-fed!
- Associated strong feelings of guilt, fear and failure when breastfeeding doesn't work out (especially when it did work the first time).

What could help?

- More direct/constant support from a single lactation consultant in the early days in hospital and the first few days at home. (Not terribly practical cost-wise but I am very confident that it would have helped me).
- More lactation consultants being employed by hospitals so that it's easier for new mums to speak to them while still in hospital.
- A more understanding attitude from all concerned re: difficulties, pain, and the importance of having a lactation consultant help you when you're having trouble.

That's about all I can think of – if only there were a way to stop the nipples from getting damaged in the first place – now that would be a breakthrough!! I don't know if my skin is just particularly sensitive (I believe it may be) but for me it was the pain that was the worst part about breastfeeding. It did eventually stop with my first child, but with a toddler to look after I just didn't have the same amount of time on my hands to concentrate on getting through the pain and getting it together this time around. However my son is growing and feeding happily so although I will always feel guilty for not breastfeeding him, I am also happy that he is going so well on the formula.

I hope that the above information is useful to you in your study. I really did want to breastfeed my son so if the above information can help other mums in future, that would be great.

Many thanks for the opportunity to share my experience with you. If I can be of further assistance in your study, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,