

Submission no. 414AUTHORISED: 20/6/07 *R***Subject:** Difficulty Breastfeeding Due to Undiagnosed Thyroid Problems

Hiya !

Bub Hub mentioned that you were looking for submissions on having difficulty breastfeeding and I thought I'd write in as I had an atrocious time and it turned out that I had an undiagnosed and rather serious thyroid problem.

I had enormous difficulty giving my baby enough milk and eventually gave up breastfeeding at three and a half months, exhausted, cold and constantly weepy. The community nurse told me not to give my baby top-ups and to just let him scream for ten or 15 minutes then put him back on again. I'm so glad I chose not to take her advice: it turned out that I had developed hashimotos thyroiditis and was completely physically incapable of making enough milk for my baby. I became deeply upset because I felt that I was letting my baby down and was being a bad mother. I wanted to write to you to tell you about this, as I went to a doctor recommended on Beyond Blue as being someone interested in post-natal depression and she whacked me straight onto anti-depressants without performing ANY tests. The anti-depressants did NOTHING for me and in desperation I went to another doctor I had found on the internet after Googling my symptoms !! He was VERY angry with the first Dr - apparently she should have run blood tests before putting me on anti-depressants and that would have shown up my problem immediately. The connection between thyroid and breastfeeding is that if you have hypothyroidism (low thyroid levels), you don't produce enough breast milk, AND it makes you depressed, so I got a double whammy that I felt like a bad mother because I couldn't feed my baby AND I was depressed because of the thyroid problems. Apparently one in eight women develop thyroid problems after birth, so I think that this is an issue that you should have a look at in detail as it may well explain why some women have such terrible difficulties.

I would like you to make it part of the care guidelines for women that they automatically get their thyroid tested as part of their post-natal checkup at 6 weeks and again at 6 months. This would have saved me so much pain and despair - I was almost suicidal and what should have been a happy time was spoiled by feelings of uselessness and that I was letting my baby down because I couldn't feed him properly. I was actually "saved" by my sister-in-law who told me that I would not be hurting my baby by feeding him formula, and he absolutely thrived on it. (She had been through the same rubbish back in the seventies and had been saved by her neighbour who had marched her down to the chemist and brought all the formula and bottles.)

While we all acknowledge that breast is best, the militant attitude that it is the ONLY way is extremely hurtful and unhelpful to women like myself who physically can't produce enough milk. My new Doctor was amazed at what I had put myself through - feeding the baby for 45 minutes on each breast, then a 150ml top-up, then a half-hour wait, then the pump to try to "get my milk up", then an hour, and then back with the baby. I mean, this is crazy ! I went crazy ! And the best advice I got from the Community Health Nurse was "don't give him top-ups and then put him back on again after 10 or 15 minutes". How cruel and thoughtless, when I was obviously having such terrible difficulties. She obviously thought it was completely OK for me to have a baby on my tit for two hours out of every three, and presumably shower in my sleep. I'm getting quite upset now, just telling you about this. There is a difference between supporting women to breastfeed and making them feel like a bad mother if they don't, and I was made to feel like a bad mother when I had a physical problem which should have been picked up far sooner than it was, especially since the inability to breastfeed is a symptom - the assumption on the part of the community nurses is that you're doing something wrong, or that your technique is incorrect, or that you're just plain lazy.

Needless to say I changed community nurses after that, but my new one, although much warmer and more thoughtful, had never heard of my problem, which astonishes me considering how common it is.

Please make post-partum thyroid issues a part of your investigation for this inquiry - even an awareness campaign for the Community Health Nurses would be brilliant - depression and coldness and inability to make enough milk are SYMPTOMS of what can be a very serious disease, and these Nurses should be trained to recognise these symptoms at the very least.

Yours Sincerely,
Molly Tinsley