

Submission no. 430AUTHORISED: 20/6/07 *R***Subject: Breastfeeding Story Request**

I am emailing in response to a request for breastfeeding stories that was posted by Ms Pauline Brown on the Bub Hub website on 24/05/2007.

I am a 31-year old mother of two children and had my first child at age 29. I had always just assumed that I would breastfeed my children and never really gave it much thought.

When I fell pregnant with my first child, my husband & I attended birth preparation classes, as do many new parents-to-be. The midwives spoke briefly about breastfeeding and gave us literature that told us how it was done. I don't recall paying a great deal of attention, as while I knew it was possible to have problems breastfeeding, I naively assumed that the people who did have problems were in the minority and that the ones who gave up & went to formula just simply did not try hard enough.

I had my daughter via c/section and wanted to feed her as soon as possible. The hospital policy at the time (I had my children at Nambour General Hospital) was geared towards mothers being able to breastfeed their babies as soon as possible after the birth, but from my experience, I feel that was more aimed at mothers who delivered vaginally. There was not much support or information in place for mothers who had a c/section & wanted to feed as soon as possible. I asked to feed my daughter in recovery & while this was granted, at the last minute I was told it wasn't possible due to an emergency in recovery with another patient. I was able to feed my daughter for the first time about an hour or so after the surgery.

While a midwife was in attendance for this first feed, I don't recall getting any specific help in relation to feeding my new baby. I had never had any experience of newborns before and really hadn't the faintest idea what I was doing! I don't specifically recall subsequent feeds, although I know they didn't go as well as I'd hoped. There was one feed I vividly remember however. It was in the middle of the night the first night after my daughter was born. A midwife told me it would probably be best if I fed my daughter lying down, due to pain from my c/section. She placed my daughter beside me and left the room. I found it extremely awkward & uncomfortable to feed this way, but was unable to manouever into any other position. I buzzed the nurse, but my baby was crying quite loudly & not wanting to wait for the nurse to come back & wake others in the shared ward in the meantime, I just attached my baby as best I could. The nurse popped her head in the curtain briefly, saw my daughter feeding, then left. I was in an incredible amount of pain after that feed and by the next day, I had started to develop cracked nipples. By the end of day 2, I had cracked & bleeding nipples, and by the time I left hospital on day 5, I was in excruciating pain, with severely cracked nipples which were bleeding profusely. I expressed concerns that I wasn't able to breastfeed properly, but was told that I would get the hang of it & that once I did, I would heal quickly.

At home, I was at a total loss. The hospital no longer had at home midwife visits due to lack of funding, and I had no idea where I could get help. Every feed was excruciating and I dreaded it so much I would cry every time I heard my daughter wake up, knowing that she would want to feed. Every day & every night, she was very unsettled and wanting to feed almost constantly (which I later discovered was almost certainly due to her not getting enough milk because she was not attaching properly). By the second night back at home, we had decided to supplement her night feeds with formula because I simply could not bear the pain any longer. I was devastated, but at the same time, relieved. I could also see my daughter was more relaxed, so we started supplementing further feeds with formula. A few days later, I came down with quite a severe case of mastitis.

My GP was sympathetic & gave me some ideas as to how we could overcome our problems, but it wasn't enough and 2 weeks later, I was back with an even more severe case of mastitis. My baby was only 4 weeks old and I told my GP that I didn't want to breastfeed any longer because I could not stand one more day of the constant & excruciating pain I'd experienced every moment since my daughter was less than a day old. It was truly devastating, but I just didn't know what else to do.

I fell pregnant with our second child when our daughter was 7 and a half months old. From the moment I discovered I was pregnant, I started finding out as much as I could about breastfeeding, and the specific problems I had experienced with my daughter. I saw a lactation consultant who specialised in helping mothers who had had breastfeeding problems with a previous child & wanted to avoid the same issues again.

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When I had our second child, a son, I ended up having an emergency c/section. As soon as I knew I was to have another c/section, I asked if I could feed my child as soon as possible after he was delivered. I was told that if all went well, I could feed him while I was still in theatre. Of course, I wanted to do just that!

After our son was delivered, he was placed over my chest to feed and I was supported by midwives. Unfortunately he stopped breathing several minutes after delivery and had to be taken to the Special Care Unit, so I was unable to feed him for long, but those few minutes, I feel, made a world of difference! Even after I returned to my ward, there was a lot of importance placed on having my son returned to me as soon as possible so that he could feed again.

Since the birth of my daughter in October 2005, the hospital had become Baby Friendly Hospital accredited. The difference I noticed in support and information with regard to breastfeeding between the time I had my daughter and when I had my son was immense! The information given was consistent and relevant. It was given in a timely and professional manner and all the issues I had were addressed immediately. By the time I left, although I had some minor nipple damage, I was happy & confident that we would be able to continue breastfeeding successfully. I was also given a great deal of information & contact details to take home with me in the event I needed more support.

12 weeks later, my son is a very happy, healthy, fully breastfed baby!

I would love to see more hospitals becoming a part of the Baby Friendly Hospital initiative, as I feel this was tantamount in me being able to successfully breastfeed second time around.

I'm very glad to see the government making a positive step in giving women the right information about breastfeeding. While it is certainly a normal & natural thing, I think we often lose sight of the fact that in modern western society, many first-time mums have never had experience of babies before & have not had the chance to live around other women breastfeeding their children as a natural, normal way of life as women often did in the past, or do still in other cultures. To overcome this, we need to ensure that women are made aware that problems can & do occur and exactly what steps to take to resolve these problems.

Thank you.

Fiona Thomme