

Submission no. 409AUTHORISED: 20/6/07 *Pa***Subject: Breastfeeding**

Dear Pauline

I read your post on Bubhub requesting feedback on people's breastfeeding experiences.

I have one son, Lachlan, who is 9 months old and was exclusively breastfed until 6 months of age, and is now eating solids and breastfeeding.

I had a lot of difficulties initially breastfeeding so thought I could share my story with you in the hope it helps provide more services for people struggling when trying to establish breastfeeding.

When I found out I was pregnant I did a lot of reading and soon realised how beneficial breastfeeding is for children and decided that this is what I wanted to do. Interestingly my mother, who had her children in the mid 70's and formula fed both of us, was quite negative about this, and defensive about her decision to formula feed both me and my sister. I decided to join the Australian Breastfeeding Association and attended one of their classes while pregnant introducing breastfeeding. I also read a lot of literature and felt very prepared to start breastfeeding when my son was born.

I live in country Victoria, but gave birth to my son in a private hospital in Melbourne. Unfortunately I had an emergency c-section, this was a big shock as I was aiming for a natural birth without intervention. The shock of my c-section and the recovery from it, made it difficult to begin breastfeeding immediately, and I was separated from my son for a number of hours after his birth.

I spent 5 days in hospital. Breastfeeding was very painful (to my surprise) and I was sure that I must be doing something wrong. So I called a midwife everytime I was due to feed, so they could check my attachment and help me get him attached. Unfortunately, basically every shift was a new midwife, who had conflicting advice on how to breastfeed, and most of their help with attachment consisted of them grabbing my son's head and shoving it on my nipple. They were so busy, they just wanted to get him attached and get on with their work. They assured me that I was doing fine and not to worry. The hospital had no lactation consultants or classes during my stay.

In hindsight I should have kicked up a fuss and requested more help, but it was hard to know what was normal. In my first week home, breastfeeding got progressively more painful to the point I had to get a face washer or something else to bite on to stop screaming when my son attached. I remember sitting there feeding him with tears streaming down my face, and just dreading each feed time. It turned out that I had large cracks on my nipples that had started in hospital. They were incredibly painful, bleeding, with no time to heal because of the constant 2-3hr feeds. My wonderful husband couldn't bear to see me in such pain and got on to our local hospital in Kyneton who had a lactation consultant. We went and saw the LC and she gave us some great advice and support on attachment. It appeared that I was doing the correct things, but the damage had been done in the early days in hospital and my nipples were not getting a chance to heal. She also showed us a video and loaned us a breast pump to give my nipples (especially on one side which was particularly painful) a chance to recover. I spent the next couple of weeks feeding on one side, and

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expressing on the other side to give my nipples a chance to recover. This gave me some pain relief, but was very difficult as it took about 40 minutes to express enough milk for a feed. My son was feeding every couple of hours, so between feeding and expressing, there wasn't a chance to do much else. It was exhausting and there was so many times I nearly went to the supermarket and bought formula. Slowly my nipples healed, but the pain and aching in my breasts was still intense, to the point that I couldn't stand anything – not my bra, towel when drying myself, touching my nipples. I now know that these are symptoms of nipple thrush (had no idea at the time) which probably came about as a result of my cracked nipples. At about 4 weeks, I was struggling along just and then came down with Mastitis – felt like I was about to die, had a really high temperature and my breasts were red, hard and swollen. My local GP prescribed antibiotics and this cleared it up in a couple of days. What I later found out is that giving antibiotics makes you more susceptible to nipple thrush, so I got another bout of that after the mastitis cleared up. By the time I had gotten rid of the nipple thrush I got my second bout of mastitis when my son was 8 weeks, again treated with antibiotics, again followed by nipple thrush. My family all tried to convince me to stop breastfeeding as they couldn't bear to see the pain I was in, and couldn't understand why I would continue.

It really took me to 14-16 weeks till breastfeeding was pain free and sorted. During this time my son was thriving and putting on heaps of weight and this was my real motivation to continue. I am now so proud that I am still breastfeeding my son at 9 months and it is a wonderful way to bond with him and I feel that I am giving him the best start possible. But I really grieve for those early weeks which were so terrible; I feel that due to all of the problems with breastfeeding I had no time to bond with, and enjoy my new son.

I believe that there needs to be lactation consultants and classes in hospitals. Midwives need to be better trained in helping new mothers, their advice needs to be consistent and it would help if you could see the same few midwives during your hospital stay. Women need to be better monitored and assessed to ensure that breastfeeding is well established before being discharged. I also believe there needs to be more follow up help when we get home, similar to the Maternal Child Health Nurse visits. It was only by luck that we found out about the local Lactation Consultant, so these services need to be better publicised. There should be home visits, classes and day seminar/stays if necessary. I realise that these services are available, but they are not available to everyone, or widely publicised. It is only through sheer bloody mindedness that I kept breastfeeding and at least half of the women in my mothers group gave up and now formula feed their babies. I also think the benefits of breastfeeding need to be promoted more, and it needs to be more socially acceptable to feed when you are out and about. In those early days it was difficult to go places as I felt very self conscious breastfeeding in public and there are not a lot of feeding rooms or other facilities mothers can go and feed their babies in privacy. I am now already receiving looks and comments about breastfeeding my son at 9 months of age. I constantly receive questions about when I am going to wean him and disapproving looks from other mothers if I am breastfeeding him in public. This frustrates me as the WHO recommendation is to breastfeed till babies are 2 years old. There is not really much support for women to breastfeed babies past 6 months.

I hope this information helps with your enquiry. Feel free to contact me if you require any more information.

Kind regards