

Hi,

I am sending this to you in response to the requests put on the bubhub.com.au website.

I gave birth to my (first) baby 8 months ago, and had many many difficulties with breastfeeding. From the beginning, I felt I was doing something wrong, because it always hurt. The midwives in the antenatal classes, in the hospital after her birth, and even the lactation consultants in the hospital made me feel that I was doing something wrong because "proper breastfeeding doesn't/shouldn't hurt". As well as being a first-time mother, I felt my baby was very unsettled from the beginning. Related to her unsettledness, I had different advice from different midwives in hospital - sometimes I would formulate a plan with a midwife during the day (e.g. to express late at night to see what my milk supply was to see if my bub was not getting enough during a feed or if perhaps it wasn't hunger that was making her cry) and then the midwife at night would not agree with that plan and make me feel so silly for wanting to express to get some kind of measure for my supply, that my plan would be thrown out the window. This was partly due to my lack of confidence as a new mother to my first child, and partly due to different opinions by the different nursing staff over the 5 days I spent in hospital (as a private patient in a private hospital).

Even my obstetrician commented on a hospital visit that there was no way I'd be able to exclusively breastfeed my baby, I wouldn't be able to produce enough milk to feed her. I understand that my obstetrician is primarily concerned for my health, but this really didn't help my confidence in breastfeeding. She also told me that the information about breastfed babies being more intelligent than formula fed babies was false.

I feel I could have done more to establish my supply in the early days of feeding, and I needed a brief refresher on the kinds of information we were given in the antenatal classes. Brochures or information in a folder weren't the right medium for me at the time, nor was watching the information channel with all the different "how to" videos cycled throughout the day. There was one breastfeeding 'class' during my 5 days in hospital (held twice a week on weekdays only, I missed the first class as I was in labour), but I was just too tired to attend that day. Daily 'classes' or information for new mothers would have been great.

Within two days of leaving hospital, I consulted with a private lactation consultant who was referred to me by friends. She diagnosed nipple thrush and cracks in my nipples, and finally I had a bit of an explanation for the pain I would feel during a whole feed. With the time to have a number of private consultations with her over the first three months of my daughter's life, I was able to feel more comfortable and confident with my breastfeeding. Although I must say that I totally disagree with the statement that breastfeeding doesn't hurt - it hurt constantly for the first 6-8 weeks of my daughter's life, to the point I would even be in tears when she attached. This pain was probably a combination of the nipple cracks, nipple thrush, as well as my body adjusting to the sensation. My daughter started sleeping through and only having five feeds a day at about 8 weeks. This was wonderful for me from a sleep perspective, but I ended up waking up in the middle of the night to express milk, which I would then feed back to her during the day. Her daytime feeds were horrible, she would fuss and pull on and off; if I gave her a bottle, she would end up getting more annoyed at my breastfeeding and having to wait for a let down. I ended up using a complementary feeding line to feed back the expressed milk until she started waking through the night again a few weeks later. I also ended up taking Dom Peridone to stimulate my milk supply, as well as herbal supplements.

Looking back on this stage, my daughter probably didn't have the strength to wake up during the night. I feel that in the first four months of my

daughter's life I had just about every problem with breastfeeding except for mastitis.

I went through a lot of trauma upon visits to a child health nurse at a local pharmacy. My daughter would have times where she should have gained 600gms or so in a month, in the next month she barely gained 100gms. My daughter did not sleep particularly well (she was a sleepy feeder, so wouldn't sleep for as long as "normal" when she was young), so I was particularly concerned about the quantity of milk she was drinking and I also wanted some kind of validation that I was doing something right as a mother - seeing her weight increase was my hope in this regard. If my daughter had one month where she seemed to plateau, the nurse would straightaway advise me to comp feed her, rather than suggest other strategies for more frequent feeding or increasing my milk supply. I knew from my lactation consultant that the charts my daughter was being measured against were based on formula-fed babies, but that didn't help my confidence as I saw her weight drop from above the 50th percentile at birth to below the 25th.

I think the following things can be done to help women who struggle with breastfeeding their babies:

- \* More information and availability of lactation consultants in hospital. Having two breastfeeding classes a week on weekdays only is crazy - far too easy for a mother to miss out on both classes unless she's there from a Monday through to Friday.
- \* Have subsidised or free lactation consultants/midwives available to visit new mothers at home in the early weeks of their baby's life. I was lucky that I had a friend who'd used a lactation consultant, but I otherwise would have been stuck for breastfeeding information, as most of the women in my family have not been able to successfully breastfeed.
- \* Ban the growth charts. Or at least, encourage the scores of old guard child health nurses that this is not the only measure of a baby's health and growth.
- \* For women to have access to information about the pros and cons of breastfeeding and bottle feeding. Many of my friends have struggled with breastfeeding or their children have self-weaned at early ages (e.g. four months). It is very hard to find decent, unbiased information about bottle feeding and the different types of formula that are on the market. Given the restrictions on advertising formulas, those mothers who end up bottle feeding should not have to rely on the knowledge of a sales assistant in a pharmacy or supermarket to help them choose a formula. I believe breastfeeding is the best for a baby's health, but I also strongly believe that there are situations where bottle feeding may be the best choice for a family.

My daughter is now eight months old, and both breast and bottle fed. I introduced formula feed for her daytime feeds, as I'm returning to work soon and do not want to express milk. After the trauma of expressing when she was younger as well as being completely lacking in confidence in my milk supply, I am just not able to face expressing again. I still breastfeed in the morning and evening, as well as late at night when necessary. With my daughter taking a bottle for some feeds, this gives her a great chance to also spend some special time with her Dad or other family members when they're around at feed time. I feel happy that my daughter was pretty much exclusively breastfed for her first six months of life, and also happy that she's coping with both bottle and breast very well now.

Thank you,

Kirsty Taylor