

15th June 2007

Thank you for the opportunity for me to give my comments regarding breastfeeding.

I am a first time mum at the age of 33 and my son is now 7 ½ months old and has been bottle fed since he was about 2 ½ weeks old.

I desperately wanted to breastfeed my baby and wanted to do the best possible thing for my son but unfortunately I was unable to breastfeed him. Following is a bit of my story regarding my experience with breastfeeding.

As a first time mum, I wanted to do what was best for my baby. I was adamant about breastfeeding and ignored all the 'negative' comments from those around me saying that I would probably end up bottle feeding. I said I would put up with the pain, no matter what... I joined ABA, went to their seminar, signed up on their website forums, subscribed to their magazine, had the counsellors phone numbers handy, spent a fortune on a breastfeeding chair, and purchased several breastfeeding tops, breastfeeding pillow, breastfeeding manual pump, breast pads, and breastfeeding storage cups - the works! I did not even look at formula (or budget for formula), no idea about sterilisation or bottles.

Then my baby was born and had to go to NICU because he had a hole in his lung. He was in there for 5 days. For the first 2 days, he was not able to have my colostrum or formula - he was fed his nutrients intravenously. He was also given a dummy (which I allowed because it seemed to give him some comfort whilst he was in the crib). In the meantime, I expressed (with difficulty and help from the midwives) **every** three hours and on the third day, he was able to take my colostrum through a tube. I did a good job of keeping up with his colostrum and then breastmilk needs every 3 hours whilst he was in NICU. Then on the 4th day, I was able to try and breastfeed him. **I had no idea how to hold a baby, let alone breastfeed him with cords and tubes all over him.** I had a little bit of help from the NICU nurses but they weren't experienced in helping with breastfeeding issues. On one occasion I felt so awkward holding my baby whilst breastfeeding, I took off my top and bra completely so he could have easier access to my breast. One of the NICU nurses came up to me with a cloak to 'cover' myself for modesty. I felt so humiliated. I understand that men often came down there to see their babies and might feel uncomfortable but I was trying to breastfeed and was having difficulties. Nevertheless I kept up with it. A lactation nurse finally came to see me on the 5th day and checked my positioning and gave me a video to watch. I had already seen the video, read the books, looked at pamphlets on the correct positioning and attachment but although I understood the theory, my baby and I couldn't put it into practice.

We finally came home after 5 days and I found breastfeeding excruciating. My nipples were split and looked like the tips were about to come off. They were covered in blisters and I dreaded feeding times (he was an enthusiastic feeder). When the nurses came to visit home, they confirmed he was attached properly but I was still in so much pain. They suggested I take a break from breastfeeding for a couple of days and feed him with expressed milk. This was also very tiring. I was on the manual pump for 2 hours at a time trying to keep up with his 3 hourly feeds. He was constantly crying (as were my husband and I). No-one told us it was going to be this painful. ABA counsellors at the seminar said that most people can breastfeed and the people who did have problems were people with inverted nipples and even then, they could still breastfeed. I felt like such a failure and a wimp. I was constantly on the phone to ABA counsellors (who were supportive - but just kept telling me he wasn't attached properly - I KNEW THAT ALREADY!!) **I called another help line at 3.00am and was told that he was hungry and to use my 'commonsense'!!!! and feed him formula.** I had no idea he could have formula as well as breastmilk. I felt so stupid and a terrible mother. This went on and on for 2 1/2 weeks (I even hired an electric breast pump), when we finally made the terrible decision to go to formula. Luckily, he took to the bottle and his feeding issues were rectified. I also got mastitis and got terribly sick. Once I made the decision to bottle feed, my doctor was very supportive and said to me that when he is 21 years of age, he will not be concerned about whether or not he was breastfed. (*I went to my GP for treatment of mastitis and for my mental health issues at the time*). I had lots of support from my husband during breastfeeding and using formula. I grieved and felt guilty for months after giving up the breast. I felt envious and depressed when I saw other mum's breastfeeding (particularly the ones who were very relaxed about breastfeeding). I also felt terribly guilty when I read and heard stories about people who continued to breastfeed successfully even after suffering from blisters, mastitis etc. I felt like such a bad mother and a wimp and felt I should have kept trying for longer. I longed to try and attempt it again, but was afraid it would confuse and upset his tummy causing more problems.

I still think that breastfeeding is best for the baby, and I think that most people would agree with that. I think that the majority of people who use formula are not doing it for the 'convenience' of it. In fact, I think it's more convenient to breastfeed. Washing, sterilising and making up bottles is time consuming. Formula is also very, very expensive. Most people I believe would prefer to breastfeed if they could, but have had difficulties in doing so and have had little or no support in making breastfeeding successful.

I know that there are many women who have persisted in breastfeeding through the pain and mastitis and that is great for them and a wonderful achievement. Everyone has a different pain threshold and there was no way I could have continued

breastfeeding with the pain that I was experiencing. I ended up with Post Natal Depression and in the end, formula feeding my son was the best thing for both of us.

I did try to get support from the ABA, but there is only so much they can do over the phone. I couldn't afford a lactation consultant, I didn't know anyone who could help me with breastfeeding and family were not living close by.

Fortunately, my son is an healthy, happy baby. He doesn't have eczema, reflux, and only got his first cold at 7 ½ months.

If I have another baby, I will try to breastfeed again and hope I have more success.

Suggestions

- Women have free or affordable access to lactation consultants (home visits) whilst they are establishing breastfeeding and also that they be available should problems arise. (i.e. visiting a lactation consultant in the same way you would visit a GP)
- There should be more midwives with breastfeeding experience employed in hospitals. I found that it was so busy at the time, that there wasn't enough time for them to spend with me.
- Have a campaign to educate the rest of the population (particularly men and the older generation) that breastfeeding is natural and nothing to be ashamed of. It's not sexual and we should feel comfortable breastfeeding in any place or situation without feeling embarrassed or ashamed.
- There should be another campaign where people should be educated that people who bottle feed their babies are not 'evil' or 'bad mothers'. There could be numerous, legitimate reasons why breastfeeding has not been possible.
- All mothers should be supported (breast or bottle fed).

Yours sincerely,

Heidi Attard