

Submission no. 463

AUHTORISED: 

Dear Inquiry,

I am writing in response to a request for input from those who struggled with breastfeeding.

My child was born in September 2007 by elective caesarean section. Although I believe that formula is an excellent food for babies, I was keen to at least try breastfeeding. Unfortunately it was extremely unpleasant for me and I believe this is partly to do with recurrent thrush and partly with an excessive demand feeding schedule. I cannot describe the pain I suffered as part of my breastfeeding experience and the toll, both financial and emotional was huge. Financially I paid for breast pumps and bottles, various creams, breast shields, thrush treatments, doctors appointments, and private lactation consultants. I would estimate the cost at close to \$1000 spent on trying to fix my breastfeeding woes for the 6 months I persevered. I sought help from the ABA, my Child and Maternal Health Nurse (who was worse than useless) and midwives. Emotionally, it was incredibly hard to bond with my son when our sole interaction was him crying, followed by the most excruciating pain that continued at all times, not just with feeding. I did not become strongly attached to him until our breastfeeding relationship ended.

For these two reasons, I believe I should have been counselled to stop breastfeeding but, because of the current hysterical worship of breastmilk, nobody would actually advise me to give up. I also feel I should have been advised to rest my breasts and give supplemental formula to help me deal with my problems and give me some respite but was told that even one bottle, or even the use of nipple shields, could cause the immediate collapse of the breastfeeding 'relationship' and was to be most strenuously avoided. One of the largest problems, I believe, seems to be the received wisdom that **"if done correctly, breastfeeding will not hurt"** and that there are no exceptions to this rule. I therefore spent longer than I should have trying to fix what, in hindsight, was probably reasonably unsolvable in my case. I think these should be some sort of standard amount of suffering a mother undergoes before someone tells her "That's enough".

I object to statements such as "breast is best" as it fails to take into account many factors which help a family decide what feeding regime is best for them and object to the very notion that scores of women abandon at the very outset the very idea breastfeeding as if it is merely an inconvenience of parenting to be cast aside.

I think that breastfeeding activists need to appreciate that many don't breastfeed because it is unpleasant for them. It isn't a lack of education. It isn't because the formula companies brainwashed them. It isn't because they are lazy. I believe this is why, despite all the "breast is best" slogans, bans on samples, warning labels, "breastfeeding friendly" hospitals and a general culture of making formula out to be akin to rat poison, many women still choose not to breastfeed.

I believe that education about feeding babies should be provided but women should not be brow beaten into breastfeeding and formula feeding parents are equally entitled to support.

I believe that the extent of difficulties experiences by many women is underestimated and the resources needed to overcome those difficulties are substantial. Phone counselling is rarely sufficient to resolve the problem and lactation consultants can't prescribe medication which may be necessary. For many, such as myself, getting to the doctor with a 1 week old is virtually impossible.

I support a move away from the either/ or mentality. Exclusive breastfeeding is not the only option and occasional bottles of formula are not the work of the devil.

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I am pro-breastfeeding but anti a movement that I feel made me feel that breastfeeding was the only option a decent parent would chose and then offered my nothing but kind words of support when they couldn't solve my problems. I would like to think there is a way to educate and support all parents who try to do the best for their children.

Regards

Sansha Johnson