


Submission no. 382AUTHORISED: 13/6/07 

In response to Pauline Brown's post on the bub hub, I'd like to share my breast feeding experience. My daughter is now 20 months old, happy and healthy, with no medical problems or recurring illnesses. And if it sounds like I'm trying to justify my decision to stop breastfeeding - I guess I am.

There is such a strong 'breast is best' movement and I know all the reasons why scientifically breast milk is a better formulation. But I wasn't one of those mothers who's baby would just happily latch on and suck. It was a battle which was leaving me stressed and my baby losing weight. In the primitive world, who knows what the outcome would have been, having breast as the only option. But in today's society we are made to feel like switching to bottle and/or formula is the easy way out and we have cheated .. and cheated our child.

The day they discharged us from the hospital (a routine 3 day stay) my daughter had lost a little over 10% of her birth weight. I was allowed home on condition that I returned in 24 hrs for a re-weigh. She had lost more weight. Another 24 hr re-weigh - more precious grams lost. I was faced with supplementing with formula or returning to hospital. All of her feed schedules were normal, and a consult showed that whilst she was latching well, she was only putting in light, fluttery sucks, not big, drawing suck and gulps. She wasn't getting the milk volume her body needed from the time periods she was feeding. Her first bottle she devoured in no time .. and would continue to inhale expressed breast milk from a bottle. Which left me on 'milking cow duty' - feeding my daughter from a bottle in my arms then attaching my breasts to express for her next feed. Believe me, it is no fun at all, but I persisted for 6 weeks to give my daughter a start with the nutrients of breast milk. Then I could handle it no more. After one particularly rough night from a usually peaceful baby, I couldn't face the breast pump. So, I reverted to the 'formula was good enough for me' excuse ... and I haven't looked back.

It is a blessing to have a husband alternate the feeding schedule with you. Yet you do feel like you have failed as you are surrounded by breastfeeding support groups etc. We could have persisted to try and 'fix' the problem, but we gave up on the stress, the soreness and the frustration and instead settled into a routine that worked ... and I enjoyed the time with my newborn.

Happy, sleeping mum & bub ... weight-gaining, thriving baby (now on the average for weight and over average height). That was better for us than breast.

So, what's hard about breastfeeding? The expectation that because it is natural, it will be easy. The expectation that all mums & bubs can do it. Stop telling mums that breast is best because if they just can't do it, they will feel like failures .. hello post-natal depression. Instead start getting the message across that it's a process, a practiced skill .. and it may take time and patience. More information & support on expressing would be good too. And what ever happened to 'milk banks'? I would have jumped at the chance to give my baby donated breast milk (certified safe, of course).

Sonia Cuff