

I heard about the opportunity to give my story via the Bub Hub and I have to say I appreciate the opportunity.

I am mother to a 2 and a bit year old and I still relive the stress I went through with Breastfeeding when I hear stories about how Breastfeeding is the best thing for babies and formula shouldn't be encouraged.

Firstly, yes, I agree Breastfeeding is the most natural product to provide to your baby, however all the well meaning publicity surrounding this fact ends up making it harder for new mums.

Here's my story.

I delivered my son in February 2005 at a healthy 4kg. I had attended all the antenatal classes with my husband and also went to the breastfeeding class - I knew all the theory. I could picture in my head how to get the right attachment and how to hold my son and I thought I had a pretty good shot at breastfeeding.

I had some friends who had tried to breastfeed previously, but hadn't had much luck and I swore to myself that if it didn't work, then I wouldn't stress out about it - yeah, right.

My son and I were getting along great, we had fantastic attachment and according to the nurse I "had great equipment" and it all seemed to be OK. I was wondering after a few days why after feeding my son for 1-1.5hours he was still screaming but kept rocking and patting and putting him to sleep OK. However, on day 3-4 when he was weighed he had a dramatic weight loss and also was jaundice. All of a sudden there was lots of action and after having my boobs poked to see how full they were (which they weren't), I was told I had to feed my son every 3hrs, take medication to increase my milk flow and after feeding him, then express and also give him a top up bottle of formula to help his weight.

Well that was the cycle for the next 2 weeks - breastfeed for 1/2 - 1hr, son still screaming, husband would give him a top up bottle of formula as my expressing wasn't enough, which he guzzled down and I'd sit for another 1/2hr to express 3-5ml's of milk if I was lucky, and then take up to an hour to get my son to sleep, then rest for 1/2 - 1hr if lucky and do it all over again - 24hrs a day.

Well, it worked after a few weeks his weight was good and we were told we'd done a really good job. Well, that didn't feel great to my sleep deprived husband and I - one night my husband who was getting up during the night to support me, literally curled up and fell asleep at my feet while I was feeding. Mean while I was dreading every feed, I would try and feed and he would pull off and scream because he wasn't getting it fast enough.

2 weeks later after switching to demand feeding during the night, I told the mid-wife we couldn't keep going the way we were and I wanted to just try breastfeeding on it's own. What a disaster, we went from 3hourly feeds to sometimes one hourly feeds - I'd feed for up to an hour, he would still be screaming I'd rock him for an hour to settle him and I'd try and feed him again - all the while my boobs were soft and he wasn't getting nearly enough to eat.

After 6 weeks I couldn't stop crying, my husband was afraid to come home from work and my son was screaming 24hrs a day. Formula it became and instantly I had a happy and contented child. I was relaxed, I was sleeping and all was good in the world again.

What I still can't explain to this day was the irrational hormonal pressure I was putting on myself to feed my child. I felt like a failure because I couldn't. What I didn't realise at the time was I had next to no milk production which my mother also experienced with my brother. When my husband and mother finally convinced me to switch to formula, I even had thoughts of breastfeeding while my husband was at work - he wouldn't know! Where do these irrational thoughts come from?

To this day I cringe when I hear 'experts' in the press telling us how we need to encourage breastfeeding and make sure more mothers do it.

What these 'experts' don't realise is that a lot of us want to, but just can't. Some of us have cracked nipples and end up feeding our child blood, some like me just didn't have anything to give them. By pushing breastfeeding as the best option, you end up backing mum's into a corner where they feel a failure and often may end up with post natal depression. What mum's really need are nurses and support people to give them a choice. What was never mentioned to me in hospital was, "Mrs Jeffree, your supply is far too low to feed your son, can we suggest Formula instead?"

In a recent visit to my obstetrician, I heard the mid-wife talking to a new mum who was obviously experiencing problems feeding. When the mid-wife told her, it doesn't matter what you feed them as long as they are getting fed and if you're not sleeping and depressed then that's no good for the child - I was so pleased. I wish someone had said that to me.

Next time I have a child, I will probably try and breastfeed again - much to my husband's horror, but I still have that irrational hormonal pressure that I SHOULD be able to do it. However, if there's no milk and by the time I leave hospital it's not happening, I will be switching to formula immediately. I have my eldest son to worry about and there is no way my husband and I will be able to repeat the routine we did the first time.

To the so called 'experts' I say the following. For some people it happens easily. For those that it doesn't the whole wellbeing of the family needs to be considered. What good is it to give the new baby the 'best' food if the mother is depressed, crying and sleep deprived and unable to enjoy the feeding and bonding experience with her new child. The whole mental and emotional state of the mother needs to be considered and if that means switching to formula, then it should be a viable and encouraged option.

I was raised on formula and I turned out OK.

Thanks for listening.

Regards

Eileen Jeffree