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Subject: Breast feeding challenges.

To Whom It May Concern,

Just some feedback re my experience breastfeeding my 2 children.

My first child is turning 4 this Friday and I had a horrendous time breastfeeding him.

After 4 days of contractions, I went to Nambour Selengor Hospital where they ruptured my waters after finding out I was only 1cm dilated. Eli was born naturally 11 hours later.

He was put on the boob within the hour and I remember telling my midwife it felt like sandpaper but he assured me that was normal. My nipples were damaged from this first feed and I stayed in hospital for 7 days hoping to get it right. Two strong memories stay with me in particular. Firstly, crying whilst standing in the middle of my hospital room waiting for a midwife to come, holding my finger out with a piece of my nipple on it that had fallen off when I took off my breast pad and, secondly, having to grit my teeth whilst gripping my child's neck and crying whilst I shoved forcibly as much nipple in his mouth to try to attempt good attachment. I would call a midwife every feed just to make sure I would put him on the boob as it was so painful. They all said I seemed to be attaching him right but my nipples were a mess. This was a horrid experience firstly because of the pain and secondly because of the guilt I feel about it being one of Eli's first experiences with me.

I don't know why but I persevered. I developed mastitis 4 times. The first being the worst where I nearly had to go to hospital with an abscess. I have a galactocele (unsure of spelling) in my right breast as a result.

The reason I had such trouble? Hard to know. I am fair which I have read correlates with more tender nipples. I also had a lot of milk - I mean a lot. And I swear I will probably bop anyone who tells me I am lucky because of this! I had a lot of conflicting advice from the midwives eg one would say to express a bit of milk off to relieve pressure, pain etc and make it easier for Eli to attach and the next would say that would be the worst thing to do as it will make more milk! I didn't have a lot of support when I left hospital as I was out of the Selengor catchment area and they didn't refer me to anyone in my area. This may have contributed to why the first bout of mastitis got so bad before it was treated.

Whatever the reason, I feel a great sense of loss that, although I breastfed until Eli was one, I never really enjoyed it and I feel it would have been just as traumatic for Eli.

I am now breastfeeding my second child Isabelle who is nearly 7 months. She was a planned caesarean as she was breach with one foot up and one down as well as having low amniotic fluid. We did do an EVC in the hope of having another natural birth (as we thought this better for the child NOT because I enjoyed the first one!!!) but she turned back!!

It was a great caesarean as we were in a midwife program 'Holding Hands' at Caboolture Hospital program and had our wonderful midwife the whole way through - even at the caesarean. We also went private to get our doctor (Dr Lindsay) who allowed us to have the caesarean the way we wanted - she let us see Isabelle come out and put her straight onto me where she stayed. It was great. Isabelle went onto the boob again within the hour. My nipples got tender but are obviously tougher second time around. I still had trouble with lots of milk coming in from day 2 - I couldn't put my arms down!! I was extremely fearful of having the same experience but I trusted my gut a bit more this time. I still called for a midwife each time I went to feed to check my attachment but it seemed I knew as much as them. When it was suggested to express, I said I wouldn't as didn't want to generate even more. I used cold packs after each feed and hot cloths right before each feed. I still nearly drowned the poor child but seemed to get through the engorgement stage quicker this time. I had a lump develop on day 4 but massaged it in the shower and rubbed it down when Issy fed so it didn't develop into mastitis. I had a good recovery from the caesarean and went home. I had my midwife Kate visit me at home and available on phone which was great. I only feed her on one boob each time - even now, as I have so much milk. I was advised by one health nurse I'd have to go to 2 boobs each feed as I wouldn't be giving her enough. I'm not sure why she said this as Issy has always put on weight above average and is thriving. This caused me to doubt myself and my boobs so I did this which backfired and Issy was upset and my milk supply seemed to drop. I reverted to one boob and she has been happy ever since. I still had tender nipples for a long time. It's only in the last couple of months I could say they don't hurt at all. But the experience is much better. If it hadn't been, I wouldn't be still breastfeeding as I don't think it did Eli and I as much good as harm in some ways - which is very sad.

Anyway, I don't know if this is the kind of information you were seeking but I am available for any information you need. I hope it helps to provide support for women to do what is best for them HOW it is best for them - support for them to trust themselves and their bodies.

Regards,
Sue Conroy

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