

# Three Babies, Two Breasts



By Davina Wright, North Shore

My breastfeeding journey began when I gave birth to my first daughter, Tayla. I was 21 years old and completely naive about breastfeeding. I had no role models, support or information, I just somehow knew I was going to do it. My nipples were inverted and I had no help or advice with latching so ended up with severely cracked nipples. I called La Leche League for help with latching, then expressed milk for a week or so until my nipples were healed and then carried on with breastfeeding. She self-weaned at 13 months, which I was sad about, but I was pregnant with number two and I thought I would breastfeed her forever. I had no problems at all with feeding the second time round but Dyani too self-weaned at 13 months.

Fast forward 21 years and I met my husband, Jason, who hadn't ever had children but still hoped that he could, so I agreed (to just one!). We were understandably terrified when we found out I was pregnant with triplets, but again the idea of doing anything other than breastfeeding never crossed my mind. We found out that triplet mums can access a year's free supply of formula but I still wasn't interested.

After a problem free pregnancy I made it to 34 weeks. Two days before I was booked for a Caesarean, my body had other ideas and I went into labour that night. Our babies were born via Caesarean on the 22nd of November, 2011. Willow was 2kg, Connor 2.5kg and Summer 2kg. They all went straight into the NICU but were actually really healthy and big for triplets. I got to cuddle Connor the next day, Summer the day after that and Willow the day after that.

I don't think anyone at the hospital expected me to breastfeed because I had to ask someone,

12 hours later, if they were able to get me a pump or show me how to get started expressing colostrum. A nurse then showed my husband and I how to express colostrum into tiny 1ml syringes. We got our first 1ml and I said "but there's three of them, we can't make them share 1ml!" So I expressed two more for that day, the next day I got 9ml, the next day 15 little syringes made their way into the NICU! Then I began pumping, every three hours day and night and within two days I was pumping about a litre a day, which became two litres within another week.

After a week I got to try breastfeeding Connor, who was the biggest and strongest. To breastfeed, a baby needs to co-ordinate sucking, swallowing and breathing all at the same time and this reflex doesn't usually kick in until about 35-36 weeks gestation, but I wanted to at least be putting the babies to the breast, even if they weren't latching at first.

My nipples seemed huge next to their tiny mouths and I wondered how they would ever get the hang of it but one by one, they all did. I would nurse them while they were getting a feed of expressed breastmilk through their NG tube, so they would learn the feeling of a full tummy and associate it with sucking. Gradually each of them started getting a full feed from me. After two weeks and four days, all the babies were taking a good feed from me and so we were allowed to graduate to the parent room. It's like a motel room where you have your babies with you day and night and you do it totally on your own before going home...but with the nurses just down the hall.

The babies had to gain weight before we were allowed to go home and on just the second

morning we had gains of 40g for each of the girls and 60g for Connor. So although it felt like a lifetime, after just three weeks we all went home.

My husband and I had no idea how we were going to do this – feed three babies all day and night – so we had to come up with a plan. For a start, I know that breastfeeding is all about supply and demand so we went against all the triplet parent advice and had no schedule for feeds. I refused to wake them for feeds if they slept longer than three hours and I refused to leave anyone to 'self-soothe' if they wanted feeding more often. Our first plan was that we would both get up to all of the babies all through the night, Jason would change and burp and I would feed.

After only four nights we realised that neither of us was getting any sleep so we switched to Plan B which was hubby took the 9pm to 2am shift and I did the 2am to 7am shift. I would pump so that he could have milk to feed them during his shift, and I would just breastfeed. Soon we realised that the 9pm to 2am was the 'screaming' shift and it wasn't working again so we moved to Plan C. This was where I took Connor into our bedroom and co-slept with him and breastfed him all night (and pumped after every feed). Jason slept in the nursery with the girls (it was big enough to fit three cots and a queen bed), and would give them my expressed breastmilk.

This plan is still the one that we use now, the girls are better sleepers than Connor and wake much less frequently for feeds and I can do dream feeds with Connor so we are all getting as much sleep as possible. During the day all the babies are breastfed, and I get a break from feeding two of them between 9pm and when they wake at about 5am.

Before I had the babies, I talked to another mother of triplets who breastfed for six weeks and she suggested either breastfeeding two and giving the third a bottle of formula, then rotating who got the formula each feed, or feeding one baby one side, the next baby the second side and by the time you get to the third baby the first side is full enough again. I decided I would try the second option. I have always had a great milk supply, and after reading about wet nurses in Victorian times who would feed up to six babies I figured I could definitely do three!



When the babies first came home they had no awake time, they woke for a feed and then went straight back to sleep. Each baby would take around 20-30 minutes for a full feed, so by the time I got to the third baby, the first breast was full again. Then as they got older, their feed times got shorter but my body was already in the swing of how much milk was needed so I've never had problems with supply. In the evenings they often cluster feed and I could do 12-15 feeds in three hours! An average day of feeding would be 24 feeds, add in cluster feeds AND growth spurts and some days I was doing upwards of 33 breastfeeds!

I can and have done tandem feeds but I find that it's nice to have at least SOME one-on-one time with each baby, and also a tandem feed with another feed straight away gives me no time to get full again. Because they are all demand fed it's not very often that all three are hungry at the same time anyway so it's actually easier than what you might think.

In the beginning there were eight bottles in the fridge that I had to fill each day for that nights feeding and now the girls may only need one or two feeds each, so I only have to pump once a day to get the 500-600mls needed for that which also saves me time.

It's wonderful to be able to do this for my babies and I get a lot of supportive comments from people but it is hard to find support with other triplet mums doing the same thing because no-one is breastfeeding. I have asked around in our triplet circles and none of them breastfed past six weeks (if at all), and they were all supplementing with formula from the beginning. So I get my support for multiples from the Multiple Birth Club, and breastfeeding support from various breastfeeding pages/groups on Facebook. I do get out quite a bit with the babies but only for short walks, it is nearly impossible to meet up with other people face to face so online support is awesome. Also, as there is always another baby to feed/change/entertain, anything that is online is easy to stop and restart, as opposed to a phone call.

My babies are now ten and a half months old, they have two or three meals of solids a day and are still having six to eight breastfeeds as well. At nine months they all weighed in around 8kg so they have grown exceptionally well. Given that we started out with a fair amount of disbelief, little support, a c-section, separation from my babies, unable to actually breastfeed for two weeks, and of course the fact that there are three of them...it's amazing how far we have come!

It's now my mission to let other mums know that it is possible to exclusively breastfeed triplets, and while it is a full-time job, it is very rewarding! 🙌

*Davina is happy to answer questions you may have about breastfeeding triplets and can be contacted via the editor at [aroha@lalecheleague.org.nz](mailto:aroha@lalecheleague.org.nz).*