

Breastfeeding in a Bottle Culture

I just happened to read, at my local library, in a recent issue of another parenting magazine an article on breastfeeding in a bottle culture, which was written by a La Leche League Leader. I wanted you to know about an experience I had and how right that article was. Also I would like other people to know that illness does not have to be the end of breastfeeding.

It might sound like this happened decades ago but it was last November when my baby was seven weeks old. I was hospitalised with salmonella, eight days in total. (Initially it was thought to be a uterus infection). My baby was being exclusively breastfed. For various reasons and I know they included concern for my well-being, the nurses encouraged my family to give my baby formula in bottles. I was told by doctors it was 'on the cards' that my daughter would get the salmonella too, yet nurses continued to want my baby bottle fed. Four days after admission my baby accepted a bottle. That morning a doctor walked in and said the baby shouldn't be there. As a new mother I didn't have the right words or information but my mother had earlier told me she thought the breast milk was providing my baby with immunity to the salmonella and so I tried to ask the doctor about this. She simply stated that there was no immunity and that the baby was in danger being with me. I felt so panicked that I told my partner to take her away immediately.

That day when my Mother came she said she heard from a friend that there was a lactation consultant at the hospital, and so she got in touch with her. No doubt the nurses thought I would now be able to rest. I guess they assumed the milk would dry up, either that or they just didn't know that something would need to be done to prevent a breast infection. Fortunately Mum thought to hire a breast pump and I definitely found pumping six to eight times a day while ill less restful than lying down with my baby.

The lactation consultant was really good and although she was professional about the way she spoke about hospital staff, I realised she was less than impressed at my baby being sent home. She talked about the fact that continuing to breastfeed my baby was definitely best for her and she gave me some reading.

When I was sent home, to a then bottle fed baby, and read the information and searched the internet I felt devastated to know that several sources of information stated clearly that a fully breastfed baby does have antibodies to its mother's salmonella. Now I was still infected and living with a bottle fed baby.

I think I was very lucky that my baby was able to latch on as soon as I attempted to feed her again, the minute I returned home. I didn't have to continue using the pump at home as my baby was eager to feed frequently, otherwise I may have needed to do this. The main difficulties were firstly, trying to maintain my milk supply while at the hospital, unwell and not eating much. I had to use the breast pump for a minimum of six times each day, for I think around 15 - 20 minutes each time. Sometimes I found I got very little milk and I tried hard just to think of my baby while I was pumping. I found the hospital grade pump good.

Secondly when I got home I felt incredibly weak and I felt as if I was fighting dehydration constantly, this continued for a number of days. Fortunately I had rung my GP as soon as I got home to ask his advice about feeding my baby again and he told me to drink lots of sports drink. This turned out to be fantastic advice and I drank bottles full at a time. I also drank resource medical drinks from the hospital and a dietary supplement for a week. This also helped a lot, as well as eating frequently, especially salty meals. Although I felt weak for two to three weeks after I got home I knew I was getting enough fluid and nutrients to provide for my baby.

Once I knew my breast milk contained antibodies to salmonella I was determined to pass them onto my baby no matter what. If you are determined to breastfeed then problems will be things to overcome rather than obstacles to breastfeeding.

Throughout, my greatest concern was always the welfare of my baby and I still feel so angry that medical professionals put my baby at risk and had not thought to ask me what I wanted and did not support me in continuing to breastfeed my baby. If it hadn't been for my Mum, that would have been the end of my experience with breastfeeding. Fortunately for the efforts Mum made I was able to get my baby back to being fully breastfed and am now aware of the importance of breastfeeding.

My Mum knew of La Leche League and had recommended the organisation to me. She knows one of the Leaders of the West Auckland Group. Also the week before I got salmonella I had attended one of the Mount Albert Group's meetings and I think their brainstorming session about how to overcome any breastfeeding problems probably did have an impact although I hadn't consciously thought about it.

I still feel disturbed that people don't realise the importance of breastfeeding, especially medical professionals. When half my antenatal class are already bottle feeding, when my work ring up more than once urging me to return part time and when people say 'you don't want to have a big baby hanging off you' I find it hard to believe that we are supposed to be an intelligent culture. I want to let people know that breastfeeding has life-saving potential.