

Breastfeeding with Inverted Nipples

Ten years ago it would not have seemed likely that I would have been involved with La Leche League today. I was bottle feeding my firstborn Madeline (albeit with expressed breast milk EBM) and slowly convincing myself that I was one of those poor women who could not breastfeed.

I did write about my failed breastfeeding experience for the then *New Beginnings* (the forerunner of *Aroha*). The conclusion I reached at the end of the article was that when you have a baby and wish to breastfeed, you must make breastfeeding top priority once your baby is born and until you and your baby have it 'sussed'. My problem was small flat nipples that became very cracked with my feeding attempts. I gave up and settled for pumping breast milk for my baby for six months. As a new mum I thought that would be long enough!

I had attended my first LLL meeting when I was eight months pregnant and had really enjoyed it. I always loved La Leche League meetings: watching the babies and toddlers breastfeeding, learning about attachment parenting and enjoying the company of the other mothers. Madeline slept in our bed until she was three which probably wouldn't have happened if I had left LLL.

As time went on I became more and more annoyed with my situation; that is, having a toddler I couldn't put to the breast whenever she became fractious or tired. I continued with LLL meetings as I had no other mothers' group and the Leaders had cleverly made me Librarian.

I went through a stage of thinking I would not have any more children as I definitely did not want another bottle fed baby. Sometimes I thought it would have been better if I had not stayed in La Leche League and instead mixed with other bottle feeders.

I can't remember why I did decide to have another child - maybe it was my husband - but I know I considered my chances of breastfeeding this time would probably be about 50/50. One factor I had in my favour this time (besides having attended LLL meetings for well over two years) was that Christchurch Women's Hospital, where I would be birthing, had employed a lactation consultant. Dawn Hunter was to be available, in theory to anyone who birthed there for up to six weeks after the birth. When I was having problems with Madeline I didn't engage a lactation consultant for long, for fear of the price. Of course I spent a lot more on breast pump hire and formula in the first year than I ever would have done on a lactation consultant.

Dawn met with me when I was about five months pregnant. The main things to come out of that meeting were: 1) she said she would be there for the baby's first feed, 2) I should avoid pethidine in the labour, and 3) she was confident I could breastfeed this time.

Being there for Lydia's first feed meant Dawn had to turn her car round en

route to a Saturday night out to get back to the hospital. A quick and easy birth meant I was a lot more energetic straight after it than I had been the first time. Dawn did not hurry to put Lydia on the breast but let her crawl up my belly. She didn't latch then but soon afterwards.

The interesting thing about being a failed breastfeeder is that you are far less confident than a first time mum. I think of it as being behind the starting line. How that manifested itself in me was that I did not put Lydia to the breast myself for about 48 hours. Dawn wrote a breastfeeding plan that the staff took very seriously. It basically said that every latch had to be perfect. For every feed I would trot down to the nursery as it was the only place with decent chairs and footstools. A nurse would help get her on and once she was feeding I did not move!

Day three was very much a make or break day. The midwives suggested I have the physiotherapist give my abraded (grazed) nipples 'light' treatment. She took me into the room and when I took my top off she said my nipples were so abraded that she wouldn't do any treatment. I went back to the ward and told myself, "Who am I trying to kid. The fact is my nipples will never allow me to breastfeed." It was obvious to those around me that my mental state had taken a definite dip and Dawn was called in. I'll never forget her looking me in the eye and saying, "Anne I've just been on another ward and told a lady she won't be able to feed her baby and I'm telling you that you can." It certainly helped hearing that and I think from then on things improved slowly. I stayed in hospital for seven days so that I felt confident at latching Lydia on myself. Lydia was a small baby (and is a small seven year old now) so I could easily hold her in the 'cross cradle' position. I fully supported her weight with my arm until she was over three months old. That demonstrates the high level of panic I had with varying a position that worked.

A funny thing happened to me after I had Lydia and had been breastfeeding her for a couple of months. I got on an incredible high. Because I could breastfeed my baby, as far as I was concerned, my baby was no trouble at all. I can remember telling my mother that I hoped I had twins next time to make it a bit more interesting.

One day I was at a very cosy LLL enrichment meeting when it suddenly dawned on me. I wanted another baby as soon as possible. My husband, Tim, was agreeable and my resolve (and high) never wavered. My period came back at ten months and I got pregnant straight away. I have often questioned the logic of that action as at the time I knew enough to know that Lydia's time at the breast would probably be reduced if I became pregnant then.

My nipples were tender in the first trimester, my milk supply was low in the second and in the third I began to get nervous about establishing another breastfeeding relationship. I didn't want a toddler feeding if my nipples were going to be badly abraded again. Tim got up to Lydia in the night for about three weeks before Finn was born which seemed to wean her. As it happened she had one final feed about a week after Finn was born and I can still remember the surprised look on her face.

Finn was born by Caesarean and Dawn was on hand again. We didn't do the crawling up the belly routine but she made sure his first feed was a good one. I can't remember too much about establishing feeding with him except that once again I got abraded nipples (even though I basically had still been feeding Lydia.) By day five I felt confident though so he was by far my easiest time.

Because of my six months on a breast pump with Madeline I have avoided them like the plague with the other two children. They were advised by nurses at the hospital a few times but to me they always represented intervention; an intervention that had led to not breastfeeding Madeline. If breast pumps or more importantly formula was not so readily available, would Madeline have been breastfed? I suspect she would have been and probably for a long time, she still liked a bottle at three.

Over the years I have spoken to many women who did not manage to breastfeed their first baby and most did not feed their next babies. It seems you either become more determined or you become a bit anti it. And often the anti ones will fire bullets at breastfeeding. If it hadn't been for La Leche League I think none of my children would have received much breast milk. Attending meetings when Madeline was a baby kept me pumping and all the subsequent meetings ensured I'd give it the best go possible when I had other children.

As a postscript I learnt to feed lying down with Finn at three months (I never had to get up to a baby again after that) and he weaned four years later. I became a La Leche League Leader when he was 14 months old and I am still even though all three children are happily at school now.