

## *Tough Love*

**The early days of nursing were awful!** Comfortable? No way. Sometimes the pain seemed unendurable. I had dark moments when I doubted that breastfeeding was the right thing for us.

**I had always planned to breastfeed my baby.** My younger sister, Pam, had successfully breastfed her three, and I had seen them develop into happy, healthy children. I looked forward to nursing as one of the rewards for getting through pregnancy and as a way for my new baby and me to have the closeness I saw in my sister's family. I couldn't wait.

**Our difficulties began immediately.** Within hours of Julie's birth, I was very sore. I couldn't get her to latch on most of the time and when she did begin to suck, I flinched with pain. The hospital staff was sympathetic but they offered conflicting advice. The nurses also wanted to see more wet diapers and advised me to give my baby bottles of sugar water. I felt powerless, threatened, and anxious but still kept trying to nurse Julie. The first two weeks are a blur to me now but I remember that by about 2 1/2 weeks, Julie and I were still having a terrible time nursing. My nipples were cracked and bleeding. I called a friend who put me in touch with a breastfeeding specialist and I began to work closely with her to try to resolve our problems. Some positioning changes helped, but Julie was still an extremely "tight" nurser, clamping down so hard that she was actually inhibiting the free flow of milk. So my milk production dropped in spite of round-the-clock nursing and I developed a nasty breast infection. I went on antibiotics for the infection and took Julie to the pediatrician's office for a weight check. No gain in the past 10 days.

**The pediatric nurse gave me a can of formula,** saying, "Your baby hasn't gained enough. Give her at least an ounce of this after every feeding." When I asked her why, she said simply, "Because you don't have enough milk." Yet I knew that if I nursed less, I would have even less milk. I was heartbroken. What had happened to my dream of nursing?

**Did I have a choice here?** I talked to my husband and my helper. I didn't want to risk my baby's health just to fulfill my own dream to breastfeed but I knew that there were both short- and longterm risks associated with formulas, too, and I wanted to be reasonable. Besides, we were just beginning to see signs of progress - diapers a little more wet, Julie's jaw feeling a little looser. At my helper's suggestion, I started to pump breastmilk and to feed Julie the pumped milk with a dropper between regular nursing sessions. We felt sure that the problem lay with Julie's nursing, not with my ability to produce milk, and that the fastest way to increase my milk was to augment Julie's efforts with a good pump. My husband and I agreed that if she hadn't gained weight by the weekend, we would reconsider formula.

**The first day or two of pumping were discouraging.** I pumped conscientiously several times a day, even at night, for only a few extra teaspoons of milk each time. After a few days, though, the pumping got easier and the milk started flowing. And by the weekend, Julie had gained - two ounces in three days! I told my pediatrician at the weight check that I had supplemented with my own milk, not formula, and the doctor encouraged me to continue on that course. No formula necessary! I kept pumping, and Julie's abilities kept improving. She gained steadily over the next month, and began to get downright plump. But I began to worry again when she started refusing the pumped milk. I had become so accustomed to "catastrophic thinking" that I didn't realize she was full from good nursing and just couldn't hold more! I stopped using the pump for good.

**The pain didn't disappear right away.** "Will it always hurt a little?" I wondered. In my case, relief was gradual. As Julie grew, she continued to loosen up. By the time she was 2 months old, I began to trust that what my helper and others had told me was true: the soreness would go away. I weathered another breast infection and realized along the way that I was suffering from the general anxiety and depression that sometimes go with new motherhood. But I could see the light at the end of the tunnel. By 3 months, Julie and I were pros, and my confidence as a new mother grew by leaps and bounds. I had done the right thing for my baby, and I knew it.

**How did I get through the dark days?** Well, there were some very specific things that helped: taking one nursing at a time; having help with the house and meals; frequent hot showers, letting the hot water run over my back onto my breasts; acetaminophen (Tylenol®); Lamaze breathing (I never used it during labor and delivery but it really worked for the first painful moments of a nursing session); hot washcloths on my breasts; walking around without a shirt or bra when possible; keeping the house warm (Julie was born in January); massage; and most of all, knowing that a sympathetic ear was just a phone call away. The love and support I received from friends (both old and new) and family and the love I felt for my baby meant everything to me. A great deal of joy was mixed with the pain and anxiety of that period. And I steered clear, whenever possible, of those who might discourage me!

**We often think of the new mother as gentle and loving, but the new mother is also tough.** She delivers a baby and then proceeds to care for that baby around the clock. It took toughminded resolve as well as love and tenderness for me to continue nursing but the rewards have been unbelievably great. I gained a lot of confidence, not only as a mother but as a person. Loving, convenient, comfortable -- these are the words that now come to mind when I nurse my bright and healthy daughter, who is nearly two and a half.

**Were those grueling early days worth it? Absolutely!**