

My Breastfeeding Experience By Dr Amy Chin-Atkins

When I was pregnant, I read up on pregnancy books and got a general idea that breastfeeding is good. I did not know then that there were entire books or organisations dedicated to breastfeeding

When Liam was born, the midwife helped us attach for a short time. He suckled immediately.

However, he had a temperature and was whisked off to the neonatal care unit. I didn't get to see him again until my husband David went and brought him back with a nurse who happily announced that he'd just been fed, and would require another feed in 3 hours. I was too stunned to say anything but "Thank You". At no point did anyone ask if I intended to breastfeed. I assumed they had checked my registration form from 7 months back when I had ticked the breastfeeding box.

I asked to room-in, and the first night around 1am I fed him the instructed 15 minutes on each side, but he seemed to want more. I wasn't sure what to do so I asked the nurse. Instead of saying "just attach him and feed him until he detaches himself", she said "that's okay, we'll feed him in the nursery. You get some sleep". So I left him in the nursery, went back to my room and cried instead of sleeping because I was confused. I wish I had the knowledge and confidence regarding breastfeeding back then as I do now. After that I resolved to do things my way.

Liam had mild jaundice so the pediatrician wanted to see him in the nursery during the usual rounds. They were annoyed by the fact that Liam was in my room when all the other babies were lined up ready for inspection. The nurses kept coming into my room to get him, commenting "He's STILL feeding?", until finally they said they could not wait any longer. I then walked to the nursery with him still attached. The shocked nurses quickly parked me in the wash-up area behind a closed door and waited for us to finish.

Every time I left Liam (for his bath, for the parentcraft classes), they would feed him. I ended up discharging myself early so that the only formula Liam has ever had is what the hospital gave him. We had recently moved to Singapore then and hardly knew anyone, so we kept ringing my in-laws in Australia for breastfeeding advice.

I had 11 weeks planned for maternity leave. At 10 weeks, I developed plugged ducts in my right breast, which quickly became infected, so I visited a doctor. The ill-informed doctor offered to give me an injection to stop the milk! Fortunately I knew enough to consult a Lactation Consultant who showed me how I needed to massage my breasts harder, change feeding positions & my own sleeping positions to help clear the blockage. The mastitis turned out to be a blessing in disguise as she gave me great encouragement to combine breastfeeding and working. She also showed me how to improve my hand expression technique - a method I used successfully at work until Liam was 6 months and I bought my trusty Ameda electric pump.

One day at work, when I was desperately missing my baby, I started surfing the internet and discovered a whole new world - websites about babies, parenting, slings, breastfeeding clothes, the BMSG(S), the Breastfeeding Newsgroup and email lists and more! A major turning point was when I read articles by Kathryn Dettwyler about the natural age of weaning being 2-1/2 to 7 years and the role of breasts in Western & other societies. With that, I became a breastfeeding advocate.

Liam is now 17 months' old and nurses about 12 times a day. Breastfeeding is still very important to both of us; particularly so because I work fulltime and breastfeeding keeps us closely connected. Initially I had planned to breastfeed Liam for 6 weeks. Now my aim is to nurse him until he can remember it, and for him to self-wean. Whenever anyone asks me about breastfeeding, I answer "It's the BEST thing I've ever done in my life!".

This story was written by Amy in August 1999. She works full-time as a researcher, and is one of our newly-trained Counsellors.

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