

Breastfeeding ... What An Experience! By Brenda Loke Lai Fong

Having read and heard about the many benefits of breastfeeding, I was determined right from the start to give it a try. However, being a first-time mother, I was not sure whether I would succeed at it. Some colleagues and friends told me they tried to breastfeed but somehow, either did not succeed or could not do it for long because they did not have enough milk or because their babies did not want to suckle at the breasts. Therefore, months before my baby was due, I prepared myself by reading up about breastfeeding, talking to experienced mothers who have breastfed and attending talks on the subject.

Well, I am glad to say that up to this day, I am still breastfeeding my eight-month old baby.

While in hospital after delivery of my boy, I opted for total breastfeeding, and so, the hospital staff did not offer the bottle to him. When my milk flow did not come in by the end of the second day, I was really anxious, but was told this was normal, and that a newborn with a good birth weight always had "reserve". As I had requested for total breastfeeding, the nurses regularly brought my baby to me for feeding. Even though there was no milk yet, I let him suckle to stimulate the milk flow. Initially, my newborn needed a little guidance while latching on. For additional stimulation, I also borrowed an electric breast pump from the hospital, for which they charged rental. While still anxiously waiting for my milk supply to start, I attended the classes for breastfeeding mums where I picked up some practical tips during my few days in the hospital. Much to my relief, my milk supply started in the late afternoon on the third day.

I will not say that breastfeeding is a breeze, especially during the confinement period. While still physically recuperating from childbirth, I had to get up an average of four times every night to nurse my newborn child. Breastfed babies move their bowels more often, and so, my husband and I found ourselves waking up a few times each night to clean our boy and change his diapers. I also found myself breaking traditional taboos that say a woman during confinement cannot wet her hands or body too often, more so at night. Well, I had to keep myself clean for the breastfeeding, day and night.

But then again, I have set my mind to give my baby what I know is best for him, and so, nothing will allow me to give up breastfeeding him. Not when I see my newborn becoming such a natural at the breasts as each day goes by. Not when I see those agitated cries being soothed immediately when he is being nursed at the breasts. Not when those roaming little fingers caress ever so sweetly at my cheeks, neck and chest during nursing. Not when I see that contented smile on his face after his hunger has been satisfied. Not when I feel our bond getting stronger with each feed ?

So much so that I decided to extend my maternity leave by taking more months of annual and unpaid leave from work, just so that I could exclusively breastfeed him at home. When the days were near for me to return to work, I spent much time expressing breast milk into bottles so as to give my boy time to be comfortable with suckling from bottles. I also expressed several more bottles for keeping in the freezer. These were to be used to tie him through the first week without mummy at home, and in case he got fussy over the formula supplements given in the day.

I have since returned to work, and I now nurse my child at the breasts in the evenings and early mornings. During office hours, I need to express milk twice a day to maintain the supply. This can be quite inconvenient especially when the working day is a busy one. Staying in the toilet for some time to express milk is also not a very comfortable experience. In spite of this, I refuse to wean my baby totally from breast milk, seeing how much he enjoys being breastfed. There will come a day when I will have to. But for the time being, mother and child are still enjoying the bond that has been forged at the breasts for the past eight months. All these, of course, would not have been possible if not for my very supportive husband and my boy's doting father.

If a new mother were to ask me how to succeed at breastfeeding, I will advise her to equip herself with knowledge on the subject by reading, attending talks and talking to experienced mothers before baby arrives. Latch the baby on frequently to stimulate the milk supply. It is also necessary to invest in a good breast pump. Express milk into bottles to give the little one some time to get used to the bottle. Persevere through the initial tough period - the experience gets better each day. Most importantly, have the determination and conviction that breastfeeding is best for your baby!

Written on 19 July 2001 Brenda is a BMSG member. She went back to work when her baby was about 6 months old and went on breastfeeding him for another 4 months. She is now about 8 months pregnant with her second child. --- March 2003 © BMSG (Singapore)