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Breastfeeding Twins

AIMS Journal 2006, Vol 18, No 2

Sarah Elliott contrasts feeding her first two babies with breastfeeding twins

When I first found out I was pregnant I never even considered breastfeeding. My only experience of feeding babies was bottle feeding my younger brother and sister and I was the first amongst my friends to have a baby. I was twelve weeks pregnant when the midwife booked me in and gave me a leaflet about the advantages of breastfeeding. I looked at it and put it away with everything else. When I was 27 weeks pregnant I heard a couple of women discussing breastfeeding and how they were looking forward to it, it was the first time I had even thought about it.

I was still undecided when I started going to a parentcraft class. When I arrived the midwife asked if anyone wanted to talk about anything, so I asked, "how should I feed my baby?" I told her I wasn't convinced about breastfeeding and I would like to know more about it. Her response was "I don't understand why anyone wouldn't want to give their baby the best start in life!" she then asked if everyone else if they were going to breastfeed and when they said yes she changed the subject. This didn't convince me to breastfeed, so I bought some bottles and formula milk as well as nursing bras ready for when the baby was born.

I asked my partner about breastfeeding and what he thought. He already has two children from a previous relationship and he told me he didn't think it was a good idea because there was only me that could get up during the night and I wouldn't get a break.

At 35 weeks I went into labour. In the delivery suite, just as I was about to give birth, the midwife asked how I wanted to feed. For the first time I actually thought about what I wanted, not what others would say. I knew it would be easier to bottle feed after breastfeeding if I changed my mind rather than trying to breastfeed after my baby had had a bottle. I told the midwife I wanted to have a go at breastfeeding. When my daughter was born, she fed really well about half an hour and then she slept for 24 hours when she fed really well again. The following day I needed help to wake her and feed her, and by the time she was three days old she had jaundice and it was impossible to wake her, let alone get her latched on and feeding.

I was told to express my milk so the midwife could give it in a cup. Every three hours we tried waking her but she wouldn't, we tried to encourage her to feed but she just lay there and let the milk drip onto her lips. I was devastated; I didn't know what was going on or why it was happening. When my baby was four days old, a midwife gave her my milk in a bottle. At five days nipple shields were advised, it was like

someone had waved a magic wand. I left the hospital after ten days, still using the nipple shields. I was just grateful she was eating and we were home. The following day my community midwife explained the disadvantages of using the nipple shields, Without nipple shields I got very sore and upset. I thought it was time to stop but my partner was really supportive, he realized how much better it was for the baby and he asked me to wait until the midwife came. A few days later the midwife from the parent-craft class came, I didn't say anything to her about stopping because I knew whatever she said she would upset me. That night my little girl didn't stop feeding, I felt sore and uncomfortable and ill. It was a struggle to sit up for five minutes without going dizzy. It was at that moment I said enough is enough and I gave my daughter and a bottle to my sister-in-law and went to bed for the day. For the following week I didn't feel bad or guilty, I felt relieved, but then she got constipated and there was nothing I could do.

When my daughter was four months old, I was pregnant with my second baby, my midwife mentioned breastfeeding and I told her I would do it this time because I never wanted to make up and sterilise bottles again. At 35 weeks pregnant I had my baby boy on the kitchen floor. He needed oxygen at first then we tried him at the breast, he wasn't interested. When we got to hospital his blood sugar was low so the midwife gave him formula, I made sure it was given in a cup.

When he was two days old he got jaundice and became sleepy. When he was five days old he had to go to the special care baby unit to be tube-fed. As soon as his jaundice started to clear up he fed brilliantly again. I felt great and really proud, especially when he started to put on weight. It was all down to me and my milk!

When my little boy was four weeks old I went shopping with my sister-in-law. Half way round the supermarket my son started screaming for milk. When we had paid I suggested we go into the cafe and eat whilst I fed. When we sat down she looked at me and said "you're never going to feed him here are you? Go and ask at customer services if there is somewhere to feed in private." I was told I could feed in the cafe but there wasn't a private room. My sister-in-law's reply was "go into the toilet to feed, people don't want to see breasts." An elderly woman who I had never met before stood up for me but I walked off crying my eyes out. I sat in the car park to feed my little boy, tears streaming down my face. I said after that I would never let people tell me where I could and couldn't feed.

Everything went really well until the week before his first birthday when I got a lump just above my nipple, every feed would rub and my skin was really raw. I thought after the first month or so I wouldn't have any more problems but this really hurt. It took a couple of weeks for everything to clear up and I went on to feed my son until he was sixteen months old, just as I found out I was three months pregnant with twins! I was incomplete shock and as I started to tell people I was having twins they asked if I was going to bottle feed this time, just because they were twins.

I went into labour seven weeks early and when my boys were born I held them for about two minutes before they were taken to SCBU. I didn't see them for four hours and when I did see them they had tubes up their noses and had been given formula. I told the nurses I wanted to breastfeed, I didn't want them to have a bottle. There was a breast pump in my room, but I had to work out how to put it together and use

it. Thankfully a friend who is a midwife showed me how to hand express.

I found it very difficult to hand express and the pump wouldn't work, the tiny bit I did express I took to my babies. The nurse who was caring for them looked at it disgusted as if to say "Why have you even bothered, if that's all the milk you can get you should stop now!" On their next feed the nurse got a bottle of formula and started to measure it out. I still believe that if I hadn't been there watching she wouldn't have given my breast milk to them. Deep down I was really disappointed, I felt I should have known what I was doing.

When my partner brought my breast pump in from home I expressed 4oz off my breasts straight away. It was such a relief to realise I would be able to feed my babies completely. I took my milk straight up to special care and gave it to the nurse who had looked disgusted the day before. The look on her face was great and I felt fantastic. I knew I was doing all I could for them, but it wasn't the same as holding, loving and feeding a baby yourself. My babies were four days old before I got to hold them even briefly. I didn't feel like I was their mother, I didn't do anything for them. My breast milk was the only connection I had with them, I felt it was my only reason for still being there, but sitting in a room on your own with just a breast pump to express some milk is dreadful especially when you can hear all the other mothers and babies on the ward.

When my babies were four days old I was having a really bad day, everything was upsetting me. That night a nurse told me it would be extremely difficult for me to be able to feed the twins myself because I needed to stay in hospital until their feeding was established and with another two children at home this was going to be hard. She asked me how determined was I to breastfeed and indicated that there was an alternative.

After a week I finally got to try my babies at the breast, but they were very sleepy. It was strange at first because my babies were so small and my breasts were a lot bigger than their heads. I never thought they'd be able to get enough breast into their mouths to feed properly.

After two weeks I'd managed to get one of the twins to feed a couple of times a day, but then neither of them would feed and I got really stressed and upset. They could sense I was upset so they wouldn't eat and I got more upset because they wouldn't eat. I was then ordered to have a break for a couple of hours to get out of the hospital to calm down and relax. I felt guilty for leaving them but it was the break we all needed. The youngest twin fed brilliantly after that, but the eldest was still very sleepy and he took a few more days.

At three weeks old they were allowed to stay with me in my room for the night, but they still needed to feed every four hours. I was told if they didn't feed I would have to take them back to the nursery to be tube fed, but they did well. Two days later I was allowed home.

When I first got home I was overwhelmed with having to feed twins and look after my one year old and two year old. Thankfully my two babies slept a lot which gave me time with my other children. I decided to put the twins in the same cot so when one of them woke up they both would. This didn't happen, but I

could feed them one at time in bed and snooze at the same time.

To feed both babies at the same time I sat in a chair with pillows around me; I got one of the babies feeding and lay him on the pillow with his head supported. I then got the second baby feeding and lay him on the pillows. After a bit of practice I could do this and still have one or both my hands free if I needed them.

Feeding my twins together at night proved to be impossible for me. I couldn't feed them both lying down, I couldn't sit up and feed them because I was so tired I would have dropped one of them. In the end I just fed one at a time and got my partner to hold and cuddle the other one.

My babies are now six months old and I've just started to give them some baby rice. I love every minute feeding my twins and I feel so proud to know that they have both tripled their birth weight on my milk alone. When people see me feeding them myself they are amazed, but I would rather breastfeed twins than bottle-feed one any day!