

## My Battle to Breastfeed! – My 8 week Journey

My baby was born 3 weeks early, naturally using gas and air and in frank breech position! Surprise! She was 5lbs 10oz at birth and had dropped to 5lbs 2oz on day 3. Not surprising as most babies lose around 10% of their birth weight. My midwife said something that really helped – just get milk into her. I found it easier to pump and syringe feed her milk and was so incredibly grateful to my sister-in-law who had given me some pumped frozen breast milk that she had saved for me! On our first and second nights when A was crying – due to hunger? – we syringe fed her those few oz which filled her little tummy and helped her to settle.

On Day 4 she choked on vomit whilst having her nappy changed and I almost threw the syringe away! I thought that she was gulping too much air and was – plus it took an hour to feed her, then 20 minutes to wind her, she was wanting to feed 2 hourly so I got 20 minutes sleep if she settled without crying before she was awake again looking for a feed! I had to get up, pump a feed, sterilise the bottles and equipment, feed her, change her nappy and settle her to sleep again. Exhausted isn't a strong enough word for what I felt! She was also yellowy and diagnosed with classic jaundice which meant all she wanted to do was sleep! This meant setting my alarm clock to wake her every 2 hours, awful when that alarm goes off at 1hour 30mins after her last feed and I had to pump and then strip her off to keep her awake enough to feed her.

By day 14 she was beginning to go 2 ½ hours (much easier) but the health visitor wasn't happy with her weight – 5lbs 1oz. She said that Amilee had lost MORE weight. I was in tears - finally broken after the sleep deprivation and trying to ensure she got breast milk. Speaking to friends and my independent midwife they all said that having not weighed her since day 3 she'd likely lost more than 5lb 2oz and was beginning to climb back up. This made sense but I was still heartbroken that all my expressing and feeding 2 ½ hourly hadn't helped her put on as much weight as I'd have liked. I was worried and went back to waking her every 2 hours to feed her.

On day 16. I went to a breastfeeding clinic. There they gave me a nipple shield and A fed from my breast for the first time, I felt like a new woman! Wow, I was putting her to the breast finally! I was giving her lots of skin-to-skin and was covered in breast milk by an hour into A had licking around my nipples but not latching on.

Day 20 we had her tongue tie cut and she went onto my breast for the first time! She kept coming off and wasn't getting a full feed, plus I was getting sore so I went back to the shields having been told her tongue tie needed cutting further back.

Reflux – I read in a book “If your baby was breech, jaundice, low birth weight and premature you baby is more likely to have reflux” Great, well I can tick all of those! A trip to the GP after a night of A simply crying with real pain on her face all night and struggling to settle gave us some baby Gaviscon. This meant boiling and waiting for it to cool, mixing the powder with 15ml of boiled, cooled water and syringing feeding – then sterilising all the equipment before the next feed!

Day 29 Another lactation consultant came to the house, assessed her tongue tie and said it didn't look like it needed doing. I felt sure that if we could just get that last tongue tie bit cut I would find breastfeeding easy – not that simple. A did prove me wrong and went straight onto my left breast and fed for 30 minutes – and it was comfortable! Typical! The lactation consultant spent an hour and a ½ with me answering questions – and she diagnosed thrush again! This meant putting gel on A's tongue after each feed and cream on my nipples. We also had to make sure that her dummies, teats, bottles and nipple shields were all sterilised by boiling them in water for 20 minutes then steam sterilising for 4 minutes in the microwave. I felt sorry for the electricity board.

By just 3 days after the lactation lady had been I was persevering with using cross cradle and rugby hold to feed A directly on the breast during the day! Due to the amount of patience this took from me to wait for A to be calm and get her hands out of the way before getting the latch right, I used the nipple shields overnight because I could stick her on easily and it wasn't as painful.

At 5 weeks old I asked my GP for a tablet that can hit the thrush on the head. I had to battle to get the tablet but finally got a weeks worth by the time A was 7.5 weeks old. I was still sterilising, using cream and all the natural things I had suggested to me but my nipples were still bright pink and sore. The shields were my saving grace.

Soon I'm hoping to have the breastfeeding experience I've always wanted – to whip out my boob (discreetly of course!) in a coffee shop, pop her on and give her a satisfying feed which is comfortable! I WILL get there!

I've written this story for all women who want to or are struggling to breastfeed. It CAN be achieved with the right help. Make sure that you get breastfeeding support from the right people – ABM and lactation consultants are best (in my opinion) as they have in-depth training in breastfeeding and are as good as supporting you when there's a problem as to when it's just a poor latch.

La Leche League have leaflets about jaundice, sleepy babies, Co-sleeping and breastfeeding, what to expect and much, much more. I found the leaflet by the Breastfeeding Network on Thrush most helpful with all its suggestions for getting rid of it – plus I should add to use washable breast pads and change them after every feed. After washing, iron them and your bras to make sure thrush isn't living in them.

If there's anything I've learnt from this experience breastfeeding isn't easy for MOST women but my persevering and ensuing you don't have any formula in the house, you will get there! Use support from your partner overnight and have them changing nappies or settling your baby after a feed – gives you just a few minutes on your own. Use your friends and family too – get out of the house, even if it's just for an hour and don't let anyone staring at you prevent you from having a go – I've had the faff of using nipple shields in public and I did flash my boobs to the cold air a few times! but I turned by body into a corner and then back to my friends in coffee shops when A was latched onto the shield!

I'd urge every woman to just keep going, give it a good 6 weeks to get breastfeeding that bit easier and established. I've added my experience and suggestions for making it easier to my website [www.thematernitynetwork.co.uk](http://www.thematernitynetwork.co.uk) which gives women all types of additional suggestions and help on all areas of subjects in pregnancy through to newborns.