

My Battle to Breastfeed! My 5 month Journey

I've written this story for all women who want to or are struggling to breastfeed. It CAN be achieved with the *right* support. Make sure that you get breastfeeding support from the right people.

La Leche League has leaflets about jaundice, sleepy babies, Co-sleeping and breastfeeding, what to expect and much, much more.

If there's anything I've learnt from this experience breastfeeding isn't easy for MOST women but by persevering and ensuring 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 fuff of using nipple shields in public and still breastfed!

I'd urge you to just keep going, give it a good 6 weeks to get breastfeeding that bit easier and established before even considering giving up – or 5 months as I did! Its so worth it!

My baby was born 3 weeks early, naturally using gas and air and in frank breech position! Surprise! Ouch ☺ She was 5lbs 10oz at birth and had dropped to 5lbs 2oz on day 3. My midwife suggested I express and syringe feed her breast milk and I was so incredibly grateful to my sister-in-law who had donated some frozen breast milk!

Day 4 A choked on vomit today – she went limp and lifeless for a second. Milk came pouring out of her nose and mouth and I thought she'd stopped breathing.

We have a 24 hour bottle feeding regime: Get up, express a feed (whilst A is crying) bottle feed, change her nappy and settle her to sleep again, sterilise the bottles and equipment. Exhausted isn't a strong enough word for what I feel!

Day 14 The health visitor wasn't happy with her weight today – 5lbs 1oz. She said that A had lost too much weight – 9oz. I cried. I've worked hard to express and fed A every hour and apparently it's 'not enough'. Speaking to friends they all said that having not weighed her since day 3 she'd likely lost more and was actually beginning to climb back up. This makes sense, but I am heartbroken that all my expressing and feeding hadn't helped her put on weight.

Day 16. I went to the breastfeeding clinic run by Sarah Bridges, she's an ABM BF counsellor. And... she breastfed today! Whoopee! They gave me a nipple shield to help A latch on. Wow, putting her to the breast - finally! I gave her lots of skin-to-skin and was covered in breast milk by an hour into it!! It was a double sided sword though. Sarah and Pam (*Lactation Consultant*) said that A likely has oral thrush and tongue tie. So that's a baby that just wants to sleep from jaundice, has oral thrush, won't latch on and isn't putting on any weight. I just want to give up but I will keep trying.

I did suggest that Sarah should keep A there and breastfeed her and I'll have her back when she's fixed! I got lots of support, tissues and cuddles from the consultants and I'm much more positive – and I didn't leave her there!

Day 20 we had her tongue tie cut by a lactation consultant with tt specialities and A went onto my breast for the first time without any other equipment! Once left alone A kept coming off the breast and wasn't getting a full feed, I am extremely sore so I went back to using shields today. I visited the breastfeeding clinic again and Sarah and Pam said that her tongue tie was still there and said that I'd need it cut again! It cost me £100 and it wasn't done well enough?

I read in a book today "If your baby was breech, jaundice, low birth weight and premature your baby is more likely to have reflux" Great, well I can tick all of those! The GP prescribed Infant Gaviscon.

Day 29 Another lactation consultant (I didn't feel the first lady was for me) came to the house, assessed her tongue tie and said it didn't look like it needed doing!! - £55 for that. I feel sure that if we could just get that last tongue tie cut I would find breastfeeding

easy. A did feed comfortably for 30 minutes – Typical! The lactation consultant spent an hour and a half with me answering questions – and she diagnosed thrush again! That's 3 weeks we've had it now! I've got to put gel on A's tongue after each feed and cream on me. We also have 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 feel sorry for the electricity board ☺ I've had to put A in a sling, she won't be put down.

I am 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 take to calm and get A's hands out of the way, then get the latch right, I used the nipple shields overnight because I could stick her on easily (whilst half asleep) and it wasn't as painful. It means I know she will get a good feed and I can allow myself to snooze for 30 minutes!

At 5 weeks old I am visiting the BF clinic weekly, A *still* has thrush (and reflux) and was recommended to ask my GP for fluconazole that could banish the thrush. My GP refused on the grounds that it's not licensed for lactating women – but it *is* licensed to give directly to babies in a higher dose! I am still sterilising, using cream and all the natural things suggested to me but my nipples are florescent pink and sore, feeding is agony and I am dreading each one. The shields are the only things that keep me going.

7.5 weeks old - 5 weeks of thrush is making my life miserable however, I have found some friends who were prescribed fluconazole and they donated a course of treatment.

8 weeks How much do I regret being honest with my GP? Just got back from Wexham hospital – it's 3am. At *my* 8 week check I happened to be honest with my GP about my lack of patience with people telling me I should be feeding A formula to boost her weight. I thought Gp would sympathise with me. Instead she weighed A, got a checklist of developmental milestones and announced she was referring me immediately to the children's ward at the hospital to see a paediatrician! My appointment had been at 7pm! When I asked why I had to go right then (why not the morning?) and she said it was because slow weight gain is linked to cot death. I rang Sarah in tears. Sarah gave me a load of info including the fact that weight gain isn't linked to cot death and told me to chin up, but I was so scared they'd poke my baby with needles, keep us overnight and make me feel guilty enough to formula feed that Sarah made some calls for me. Pam (lactation consultant) agreed to accompany us to the hospital (at 9pm!) We waited till 2am at the hospital, but the result was a delightful paediatrician who weighed her again – A had gained 2oz in the car between the GP surgery and hospital - which says something for the scales at the surgery!! Pead. wasn't worried and referred to outpatient dept in 6 weeks time! Pam was amazing to give up her entire night to sit with me whilst I BF A hoping to show the pead. that we could do it!

It's the day after the last night and the GP Surgery has rung all day asking me to come to the surgery and weigh A *every day*. My hubby answered the phone and told them each time to leave me alone. I am so stressed that my 2.5oz I could express has decreased to ½oz, Poor A doesn't get much milk. I weighed A on the scales at the HV drop-in on (as I had planned to) and she'd put on acceptable amounts of weight – I wrote a letter to the GP saying I hope she was satisfied with that!

9 weeks old Just a 1 oz gain this week. I was taken aside by the HV who told me I had to eat copious amounts of food in order to feed (which is wrong anyway) Sarah rescued me. I spent an evening on her couch breastfeeding and being consoled. I weighed A at Sarah's drop in clinic – I couldn't quite believe my eyes when I saw her weight was 6oz gain, not 1! On my return home I rang the HV said I wasn't coming back to weigh A there anymore. Do they *want* me to fail breastfeeding?

11.5 weeks old. Visit to the Outpatient clinic. Pead asked what I was worried about and I told her it wasn't me with the worry - it was the GP! Pead. re-plotted A's weight on and said "well, she's not losing weight" she also did some checks for A's height and head

circumference – both of which had grown enough! I don't think she really knew what to do but she was said that my breast milk may not be good enough and I may have to be open minded that I will just have to give my baby formula in order to help her put on weight!! (Wrong again – more calories in b.milk than formula and b.milk IS enough) A ridiculous response from a woman who specialises in baby's health and had just told me she couldn't find anything wrong with my baby! I nodded along; I didn't have the strength to argue today.

My milk supply is still low and the stress of A's slow weight gain makes me want to give up again. I bought formula today, I cried in the aisle and put it in the cupboard when I got home. Before I had a chance to get it out of the cupboard my birth doula Tara rang to see how I was. We made a new plan and I feel much better. I'm now going to top up 1oz b.milk three time a day and 3.5oz exp b.milk bottle at midnight whilst I express.

14 weeks 3days. I reluctantly agreed to have A's posterior tongue tie cut. We got to Pam's house and Sarah met us there. Pam has taken the refresher course to do TT's – I think she's done it for me as I've had no luck with two previous ladies. She took A upstairs and came down with her a while later. I put A to my breast and I had a little weep. No one likes to see their baby upset, but it was short-lived and she was *BREASTFEEDING!* And the relief was immense. Sarah held my hand. BF felt SO different! I couldn't feel A sucking anymore and there was NO sensation – how BF *should* be! A Fed for 45mins and passed out drunk on milk for the first time ever! Could this *finally* be IT?

I can lay back and A stays on the breast, feeding well! Last night she fed almost continuously – making up for it I guess! A didn't want to sleep, just feed continuously so I've had to I give her a 3oz b.milk bottle at midnight while I expressed and then breastfeed the rest of the time. It gives me 3 hours sleep in a block!

Pam rocks! Thrush has gone!

14 weeks 6 days I moved GP Surgery after the last experience and went to see my new GP to ask for Domperidone (a drug used for IBS treatment but could increase milk supply as a side effect in lactation women) I was so impressed – GP listened to me, explained her feelings and said she'd speak to Lactation Consultant. She then spent 15 minutes of her own time on the phone to Sarah (Pam was away) and listened to Sarah's view of my battle.

15 weeks I weighed A at Sarah's clinic – 8lbs 1oz (5.5oz increase) We made it to eight pounds at long last! "Celebrate good times ... COME ON"!! Sarah stretched A's tongue and saw that it had made a HUGE difference to her mouth. No need for domperidone so GP wont need to write a prescription!

Wishing and hoping this is the corner that we can turn now!

16 weeks A is gaining 1oz a day! I'm still expressing and topping up twice a day with expressed b.milk.

17 weeks My expressed supply is going up! Expressing 6 oz every morning!

18 weeks A weighs a healthier 8lbs 11oz ☺

20 weeks I finally stopped keeping a diary. I stopped expressing and totally breastfed A. She doesn't cry after a feed, she doesn't bob on and off and she's drinking for a good 10 minutes and much more efficiently *and* she weighs 9 ½ lbs!

25 weeks A weighs 10 ½ lbs!

6 months A breastfeeds every 2-3 hours and is a happy, smiley, beautiful baby who developmentally sits unaided, loves to stand holding onto the sofa, loves swimming, music and now weigh 11lbs! I'm so proud of myself for sticking with it.

If you're having difficulty breastfeeding and are reading this, please take strength and encouragement from my words. Keep a diary if it helps and look back over your journey – look how far you've come from those first few days.

I have so much gratitude to Sarah and Pam for their support:

To Pam, for re sitting the TT training to enable her to cut A's TT! For spending the early hours sitting at Wexham park with me, for the *correct* information, encouragement and inspiration. One of the most amazing women I know.

To Sarah, for answering the phone *every time*, for having me to her home, for always having the kettle on! Providing scales for me to weigh A at her clinic, for the cuddles and tissues, her own frozen breast milk when I was desperate and many more ...

Breastfeeding clinic open every Thursday at 22 High Street, Eton. 1.30-4pm. They have ABM BF counsellors, Lactation Consultant, TT Specialist and cake :0) Drop in sometime, hopefully you will gain some inspiration for seeing A and you'll certainly get support from Pam and Sarah.

You can find my story, among others on www.thematernitynetwork.co.uk which gives women all types of additional suggestions and help on all areas of subjects in pregnancy through to newborns.