

From Tears to Trust

By Spring D.

We were planning a home birth so figured we would have plenty of breastfeeding support in home. Our baby ended up being so late that we had to be referred to be induced. Due to the baby never dropping even after pushing and the heart rate crashing, we had an emergency c-section. We had a birth class and read about hospital births and c-sections but this was so far from our plan we got lost in the hospital way of birthing. I don't remember the first attempts at nursing because of the haze of medications from the c-section even though I refused all pain medication after the operation besides ibuprofen.

Before we left the recovery room we were already instructed that we needed a nipple shield to help the baby latch on. No one checked the baby's mouth or checked to see if there was any problems. No lactation consultant was brought in, just the nursing staff. The baby and I slept from the medication in our bodies and exhaustion and we struggled to wake him up for feedings. I had never held a new born before and struggled to figure out how to position him for nursing, afraid to hurt my new baby.

The nurses told me I had to hold the back of his head and shove his head onto my nipple. I was confused after spending 5 days in the hospital. Who was a nurse and who was a certified lactation consultant? Everyone offered their advice as we struggled to nurse and made me feel guilty for not getting him fed every two hours, without explaining how important it was for him to get the food to have the strength to nurse. Yet every time I tried to nurse I was interrupted with someone coming to check my vitals and when they were done and I would start again. Then someone would interrupt us again to check the baby, never at the same time and never having any problem interrupting us while we were trying to nurse.

We asked for lactation consultants but it would be hours to days before we saw one as they were busy, we were told. I did not understand the extent of what was going on because I had always understood if a baby was hungry or wanted something they would cry. He seemed happy since he was sleeping, in my mind. The nurses would ask us how full his diaper was and we had to keep track. They would ask if it was a lot or a little. What does that mean if you have never seen a lot or a little? It was all very confusing, especially with the lack of sleep, tired, sore body, and watching my baby be stuck with needle after needle, even though he was healthy, because they could not keep his blood from clotting before running their labs.

He had to be giving antibiotics because he had swallowed meconium and because they had not administered all the antibiotics to me during labor as I had been positive for step b. I was being monitored because my oxygen levels were off. We finally were able to go home. Breast feeding was confusing and I couldn't keep the stupid nipple shield on. The baby would knock it off and get upset and I would panic and I would be in tears with him trying to feed him each time. In the hospital we saw 3 different lactation consultants, I think, each had us use a different size nipple shield. One told us to feed the baby formula because breast feeding wasn't working. Each nurse and consultant tried to show me how to hold baby, nipple shield, his head, and my breast at the same time. I was so confused and frustrated because I couldn't figure out how to hold them all at once and the baby was struggling to latch on and we could not find a good position.

At our two week check-up the doctor said that the baby had not gained his birth weight back and that if he didn't he was going to be hospitalized for failure to thrive. She sent in a nurse to help show me how to breast feed. The nurse had no special training; she just had nursed her 3 sons.

She said she would call me in a week to see how I was doing and she forgot. A friend of mine had told me about a Southwest Medical Center's breast feeding support group that was free. I had given up on the lactation consultants at Legacy, where I delivered. They made me feel horrible about myself, talked to me like I was stupid, kept putting their hands on my breast and my baby and shoving the baby's head onto me. He would cry and I would cry and the baby would latch while I was with them, but they didn't empower me or teach me to do on my own.

With my two hands and theirs I could have success breastfeeding.

I tried the breast feeding support group. They weighed the baby and then I fed him in an uncomfortable conference room chair where I couldn't reach the floor with my feed and my body was uncomfortable trying to nurse. They weighed him again and told me I needed to pump, give him and extra ounce per feeding and would be fine. I did that and he started crying more and getting more frustrated. He had not improved at the follow up appointment. What was happening was that I was pumping more than an ounce and didn't know what I was supposed to do with that and was freezing it. Well little did I know I was taking milk from my baby and making him really even more hungry.

I had been told about Melissa Cole from my birthing class teacher and also had contacted La Leche League. I was exhausted so it took me way too long to make an appointment with Melissa, but finally I did and she came to my home. She was nice and encouraging and empowering. She showed me how to do different things and would have me practice them on my own. She checked my baby for tongue tie and had us do exercises to help him move his tongue to best latch on. She referred us to chiropractic and cranial sacral care for me and the baby to help with suction and latch.

It was amazing, after the first appointment with Melissa we were already doing so much better. After the first appointment with chiropractic/cranial sacral it was amazingly better. We had to use a little formula and came up with a plan to use breast milk from a friend who was a super milk producing momma. It was a lot of work and Melissa was available for house calls, on the phone and by email. She was so helpful and so kind and so respectful and empowering.

At the time I was so worried I would never be able to feed my baby on my own, but I followed her plan of pumping, feeding back the milk to the baby and taking herbs. It was really hard. I cried a lot. All I wanted was to play with my new baby. I remember crying with Melissa saying I just wanted to bond with my baby and felt that breast feeding was such a mess I couldn't.

Melissa reminded me that I was bonding with him and it would get better. I remember very painful nipples and Melissa helped me work through that. I remember hating the pump and pumping what seemed like all the time. We did so many different things; I can hardly remember all of the challenges from the weeks before Melissa but remember that I felt like I could do it when she was around.

My baby is almost 11 months old now. He is a breast feeding rock star. We are planning on at least two years of this snuggly loving feeding. I remember Melissa showing me how to feed him in bed. It seemed like the hardest thing in the world. Now every night we snuggle and it is so easy and he cuddles into me to feed, it makes me so happy. I can rock the feeding in my carrier and might be slightly proud of my nursing and do it everywhere and share that we overcame so much with everyone. Now he eats snuggled next to me in bed, sitting somewhere, standing up next to me, crawling over the top of me, sometimes while he dances. As he grows I continue to learn more about nursing and am excited for the next lesson he gives me and sad at the day he decides he is done.

(Note from Melissa Cole of Luna Lactation: I am so proud of Spring and her baby! They truly are breastfeeding rock stars!!!)