

Hi my name is Nia and I am a mum of 3. As I have based my academic studies around health studies and health and social care I have been aware of the benefits of breastfeeding since my late teens. Therefore I had always planned on breastfeeding my own children.

When I had my first child it was not the experience I had hoped for. The labour and birth did not go to plan and I ended up having an emergency c-section. The baby was taken to SCBU as he had a partially collapsed lung. I was still determined to feed him myself even though it was not easy. I would struggle to make my way to him in the unit to feed him but he would also have formula from them to top him up. I didn't have anyone showing me what I needed to do, and they didn't tell me the importance of correctly latching on. When I did ask for help the midwife just grabbed my breast and the baby's head and forced them together. It made me feel vulnerable and alone and made me feel like they were thinking '*this is what you do stupid*'.

We were in hospital for a week as he also had severe jaundice. We were finally released and we got to go home only to be back in A and E the following night because I had developed bad mastitis in one of my breasts.

I never felt comfortable feeding, I wasn't confident and I was very self-conscious. I even recall the very first time I fed in a public place I went into the disabled toilets to feed him as I was so embarrassed, I didn't want everyone looking at me. But I carried on feeding him breast and formula for 3 ½ months because I knew how important it was.

Then he went on to just formula only this is when started to develop severe constipation issues. I believe it's as a result of just having formula. He went under a consultant for this issue.

Fast forward 3 years and my second son was born. A totally different experience as everything happened text book and we got to have the skin to skin contact straight away. Within minutes he was feeding and it all just felt so right. The staff were lovely and helpful and really encouraged you. I felt much better about the whole feeding thing and not being embarrassed feeding in public anymore.

Unfortunately we had found out at the 20 week scan that he had kidney dilatation a condition called **Hydronephrosis**. This drove me on with my feeding knowing I was giving him the best I could by giving him breast milk.

Unfortunately I did develop mastitis again in the same breast as last time, but I knew what to expect this time and as painful as it was I knew with the medication and expressing and feeding that it would get better. I was able to feed him for 7 months and the only reason I stopped was because he started biting me with his teeth and it hurt too much to carry on.

Going forward another 5 years and our final bundle of joy arrives. This time it was again quite straight forward and we were able to start feeding straight

away. However this little baby liked being on the boob a bit too much. He seemed to be on them all the time for the first week. This made my nipples very sore and very tired I think I had a total of 2hrs sleep over 4 days. I even developed a cracked nipple in the first week and still continued feeding on it for 6 weeks.

I had to stop feeding him on the sore boob and expressed only on that one for 2 days within this time the crack healed up. I also developed mastitis in the same breast again. I really did think about stopping feeding within this first 6 weeks as I found it so hard. But I am glad I stuck it out as since then it has been amazing. The little guy is happy and healthy and we are still feeding. He will be 8 months old next week.

I think that more needs to be promoted about the realistic side of breastfeeding as well as all the positive things it can do. As I believe people might stick with it if they know what's happening to them isn't just happening to them, it is a relatively common thing to happen and that it will get better for example:

- Mastitis – what it is how it occurs and how best to deal with it
- Correct latching- consequences of poor latch e.g cracked or sore nipples and if this occurs how best to fix the issue
- Sleep deprivation in the first few weeks as breastfeeding is established. Explain baby will need possibly need feeding quite often during this time. But explain does get better and also that they go through phases, they settle then it seems out of nowhere they are waking and feeding more again.
- Advice on feeding while teething- especially when they already have teeth, as biting is a common issue. How best to deal with this. To ensure you carry on feeding baby and don't give in
- Engorged breasts – if baby misses a feed or when they are requesting more milk to satisfy their needs, explain how best to cope e.g express and freeze the milk.
- Babies will prefer one boob over the other sometimes -how best to deal with this
- Guidance on storing expressed milk and when it should be used by

The positive of breastfeeding for me are;

- time saving
- saves money not buying formula
- quick and easy available on demand
- no sterilising bottles or prepping formula pots
- feeling close to my baby, special time for us
- knowing he is getting the best possible start in life
- also can express milk for dad to be able to feed baby too
- best of both worlds