

MY BREASTFEEDING STORY

By Sharon

I am a mother of 1 year old twins. They were born 7 weeks early and delivered by C-Section and I am proud to say that I was able to provide them both with breast milk, nearly exclusively for the first 6 months, and as required for the next 6 months. I began by pumping every 2 hours in the day and every 4 hours at night. My daytime pumping would start at 6 am and end at 10 pm. I woke every night at 2 am to pump. I was pumping 20 minute sessions, 10 times a day. My breasts were usually empty after the first 10 minutes or so but I kept pumping to continue stimulating the glands. Often times after the 16 minute mark, more milk would come out. I was recovering from preeclampsia and taking the maximum dose of labetalol four times a day which slows breast milk production. It took about 2 weeks until I was producing enough milk for them to both have breast milk exclusively. Being preemie though, that was not a large amount; about 16 oz a day between them. I took fenugreek and blessed thistle to help bring in my milk. I was so proud of myself when I was finally able to provide for them. Having had limited contact with them in the NICU, it was one of the only things that was exclusively mine and made me feel like a mother. Everything else was determined by the doctors and nurses; when I could hold them, bathe them, feed them, but not this. I and I alone could provide my babies the nourishment they needed to grow strong and healthy to come home.

I tried to put my twins to breast once they were old enough and found it to be too time consuming to breastfeed, then top them up with a bottle, then pump. By the time I finished it was time to start again. They were still too small to have the strength and stamina they needed to empty the breast and meet all of their nutritional requirements. They were just barely 5 lbs when they came home after only 31 days in the hospital. They needed to eat every 2 - 2.5 hours and often not at the same time. I was only averaging about 2 hours of broken sleep a day when I was trying to put them to breast. I was just too exhausted to be the only one that could feed them. I needed help. Pumping on my schedule allowed me to sleep and have other people feed them. They got all of the benefits of breast milk and I got to sleep. I tried again to put them to breast when they were about 10 lbs thinking that they were more than big enough to empty the breast now but by then they were use to the bottle and I was use to pumping. I was still exhausted and did not feel up to the challenge of exclusive breastfeeding and no bottle. It was a difficult decision for me to make to exclusively pump. I really wanted the bonding aspect of breastfeeding but was too overwhelmed with exhaustion and recovering from the preeclampsia to do it all on my own. Pumping was a good compromise and my husband and family got to share in the feeding/bonding experience.

I maintained my rigid pumping schedule for the first 8 months. When they started sleeping through the night, I was still getting up to pump. At my most, I was producing 60 oz of breast milk a day with no medications or herbal supplements. I did need to supplement with formula right before they started solids. They were each getting only 3 or 4 bottles a week of formula for about 2 months. The rest was all breast milk.

I began to tire of all of the pumping and really wanted to sleep through the night. I decided to start taking domperidone so I could maintain my supply and pump less. I was

able to drop to 8 pumps per day, sleep through the night finally, and have the same volume. When they were about 10 months old, I again was able to drop 2 pumps per day and was now at only 6 pumps per day, every 3 hours instead of every 2, producing about 40 oz a day. I stuck with 6 pumps a day until they turned 1 and am now in the weaning off process which in itself opens up a whole new bag of emotions.

As I said, I really wanted to breastfeed but more importantly, I really wanted them to be breast milk fed. Breast milk was the best thing I could offer their tiny bodies and I was determined to do it. I attribute my success to a supportive family and an amazing breast pump. My family and friends were extremely supportive and together we made sure that pumping came before all else. At family and friends homes, I did not excuse myself and leave to go pump. I pumped right there amongst the conversations. At first of course, I did excuse myself but felt as though I was missing out. I hated being secluded from the action and started to resent pumping because it was so time consuming and I was stuck there sitting by myself. I decided that if I was actually breastfeeding, I would have fed the babies right there in front of my family and friends anyhow, so pumping was really no different. Everyone just accepted it as they would have if I was breastfeeding.

I used Medela's Freestyle Breast Pump. It is so tiny and portable, yet powerful. I could walk around the house while pumping, use the computer, sit and play with my kids, and managed to bottle feed them and burp them all while pumping. I took it everywhere. I've pumped in my car in countless parking lots, while being the passenger in a car numerous times, several doctors offices, other people's houses, hair salons, friends weddings, anywhere I was when it was time to pump. I just brought a cooler bag with an ice pack. Everywhere I went, people were so supportive when I needed a place to pump. Never once did I encounter a doctor's office or any other place where I could not pump. In my mind, I was breastfeeding and if I was out with a baby whom was put to breast, I would have had to put them to breast in all of those places. It didn't matter to me where I was or who I was with. My kids needed to eat and deserved the best I could offer.

I got so many compliments and congratulations on sticking with it. I was so proud of myself. Other than the extra dishes, to me, it did not seem like that much more work than breastfeeding and actually allowed me more freedom from the babies than breastfeeding. Yes it was inconvenient at times and I wanted to take the easy rout and switch to formula but then I would think about if I were actually breastfeeding would I be quitting? The answer was always no. I wanted to breastfeed for a year and for all intents and purposes, I was breastfeeding, just not the traditional way.

My twins are now a year old and have never been sick a day in their lives. They are strong and developmentally caught up to term babies. I am so happy to share my breastfeeding story with others. Successful breastfeeding of twins is possible, even if it has to be done with a pump. It was not my ideal dream situation but we made it work with relatively little disruption to our everyday lives. The payoff was well worth any inconvenience, two healthy babies and not to mention the amount of money saved not buying formula.