



La Leche League Canada

My Relactation Story

by Kelly O'Neill

On January 16, 2010, I decided to re-lactate! What prompted me to do this? A very good friend of mine, Jenn – the best of friends really - provided me with information and gentle encouragement. Jenn had the faith and belief in me that I didn't have at that time in myself and guided me back into a wonderful and fulfilling breastfeeding relationship with my son. Much to my surprise, I learned that I could work toward bringing my milk back in – even though I hadn't breastfed in about seven weeks and was completely dry. And so, with her support, I started the process.

My story goes like this:

I stopped breastfeeding soon after my son's birth – not because I didn't want to breastfeed – but because of a number of medical issues that he and I had. I had dreamt of breastfeeding my baby since the moment I knew I would have another baby. My son was born six weeks premature, via c-Section due to risks with my pregnancy, and he spent more than two weeks in a NICU. My milk never did come fully in.

I worked with a lactation consultant and followed a rigorous pumping schedule in an effort to increase my milk supply. Any milk that I pumped was fed to my baby through a feeding tube. I spent long, twelve-hour days at the NICU with my son, pumping by the side of his incubator. At home, I woke every three hours during the night to ensure I was sending my body all the right signals to keep making milk! I also made sure I did as much kangaroo care at the hospital as was permitted. In spite of my efforts, I wasn't producing very much milk. I also tried a prescription for domperidone, which seemed to increase my supply a little.

I was feeling very discouraged, as well as exhausted from the process of trying to increase my milk supply and the long days spent at the NICU. Also, once I left for the day, I had another son at home waiting to see mommy.

During this time, I also began having difficulty with my C-Section incision, which became infected and had to be treated with packing and antibiotics over a period of six weeks.

I become overwhelmed with the issues I was having: my incision, the physical pain and the fact that I wasn't seeing enough results from all my work to increase my milk supply – all combined with the fact that my baby was in a NICU. After about twelve days, I gave up pumping and asked the nurse to start bottle-feeding Braeden. I knew that the faster Braeden was eating on his own, the faster he would come home. The point had come when he no longer required any oxygen or IV and he was just there to learn how to eat. I wanted my baby to come home! It seemed very wrong to have given birth to my baby, and then to leave the hospital without him.

Braeden learned to feed from a bottle and was finally discharged at fifteen days old. When he was discharged from the NICU, my home care continued, but I did not continue to pump. My milk supply still didn't appear adequate after all the pumping I had done and the medication I had taken. Overwhelmed and exhausted, I had decided to give up.

I later regretted the decision and yearned for that closeness to my baby. I wanted to be the provider of his food. When Jenn mentioned the process of relactating, she sparked my interest and I thought that just maybe there was still an opportunity to breastfeed my baby. I was tired and worn out from the NICU experience and issues with the incision and wondered if I would have the energy. I thought long and hard and decided since my baby had so many struggles in his first days here on earth, I wanted him to have the very best he could have and that meant my breast milk – not formula. So with my friend's support, I began putting my baby to the breast again and pumping.

I knew that sometimes after a baby had been bottle-fed, it may be a learning process for the baby to learn how to suckle at the breast. To my surprise, he latched as if he had always been at





La Leche League Canada

the breast! This was the first step to a beautiful nursing relationship with my son.

I continued latching and pumping, began the domperidone again and this time added some herbal supplements as well and my milk came back! At first, it was small amounts, but gradually started to increase. Braeden initially used my breast for soothing himself to sleep rather than to eat. But it didn't matter because any amount of suckling at the breast stimulated milk production.

Jenn told me about a support group called La Leche League and suggested I seek the support of a local breastfeeding clinic as well. I searched the internet, found La Leche League in my area, and then called a group Leader. The LLLC Leader made herself available to me almost constantly yet I never felt like I would be judged if I didn't continue.

I also found a breastfeeding clinic where I received help from a fantastic nurse/lactation consultant. This nurse, Shawna, worked with me for several months and provided the strong encouragement and positive reinforcement that I needed. Shawna always went the extra mile to make sure I felt supported, encouraged, but not pushed or judged. I met with her once weekly, sought support through my friend and started attending the monthly La Leche League meetings. I had surrounded myself with a network of supports and looking back, I truly could not have done it without each and every one of them.

Over the course of my time at the breastfeeding clinic, my milk supply increased to the point that I was almost able to exclusively breastfeed my son. I couldn't believe the progress I had made and was thrilled that my son could reap the benefits.

I love the close, nurturing relationship Braeden and I have, and I love being his sole source of food and comfort. There truly is nothing like the bond of a nursing relationship with your little one. I wanted to write my story for all of those women struggling with their supply or contemplating relactation. It is a lot of work -- I won't deny that -- but it is a truly rewarding and worthwhile experience.

I offer this story as a tribute to my friend Jenn, my nurse Shawna and the Durham La Leche League Chapter. And of course let's not forget Braeden who also did a lot of work to bring mommy's milk back!

Braeden is seven months old now and I plan to continue to breast feed for as long as I can. I hope my story encourages other mommas to forge forward – even through challenging times – because you and your babies will reap so many benefits.

For more information about relactation, see: <http://www.llli.org/FAQ/relactation.html>



*photos in this article,
copyright 2010, K. O'Neill,
used by permission*