

Breastfeeding - From Pain to Pleasure

Getting the right help and advice from experts is always worth the money. This is the conclusion I came to after seeing Mary Clare McCarthy, Private Lactation Consultant, based here in Wellington. My last breastfeeding experience was anything but fun. As a first time mother with newborn twins I was determined to give my babies the best start in life, but I was not prepared for the myriad of problems I experienced.

Engorgement, then hours of feeding with poor latching led to nipple grazes and trauma. After 5 months I was eventually diagnosed with Reynauds phenomena , which explained the severe, vice like pain for up to an hour after each feed. When we decided to have another child 5 years later, my biggest anxiety was not around the birth, or coping with a new born, but breastfeeding. I was therefore determined to get help immediately should things start 'looking ugly'. And 'ugly' things became – but this time I was prepared.

I had heard about Mary Clare last time round, but for financial reasons decided not to seek her help. Instead we went to the Plunket Family centre where I did see the lactation specialists. They were helpful and supportive, but it was difficult getting two new babies out of the house, and the centre was always so busy it was difficult for the lactation consultant to provide undivided attention.* Second time round I knew better, and was prepared to pay to get the right advice and get things sorted out early. I decided the investment in myself was worth it.

Within 24 hours of me phoning Mary Clare she was in my home, working through my history and assessing what was going on. Once again latch issues were identified as the main problem. For a person with my skin sensitivity, breastfeeding in the early days seems to be a fine art, with little room for mistake. Mary Clare gave me fantastic advice to fine-tune my technique and showed me where things were going wrong. With her help, a lot of breast care, and use of Avent nipple shields, which she recommended, the grazes and cracks healed and within 10 days I was feeding pain free for the first time in two weeks.

This experience is such a contrast to what happened last time. Having one baby at a time certainly helps, but Mary Clare 's expert advice, support, and early intervention at home and when it suited Ella's timetable was so important in my recovery and willingness to continue breastfeeding. I just wish this service was routinely available to all mothers.

Ella is now two and a half months old and I can say with honesty, that breastfeeding is actually a pleasure, not a pain.

Fiona Purchas

*(Plunket Family centres are such a fabulous resource, but they are so poorly funded by the government and cannot provide the services women need. By all means use them – but if your problems are not being sorted out and it all becomes too hard – there are other option if you can afford it!).

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