

The Third Option – Exclusive Pumping

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Emily with Ada at three weeks old

“Is your baby breastfed or bottle fed?” I was asked by my Plunket nurse. It’s a question I’ve had to answer many times in the past ten months since my daughter was born.

THE ANSWER seems simple; that I have two options, to either breastfeed my baby or bottle feed with formula. Doctors, Plunket, hospital staff, relatives, friends, and colleagues - they have all asked at some stage and for me the answer is not quite so simple.

Yes, she has breast milk, but no, I do not ‘breastfeed’. That’s because from day one my daughter has been ‘exclusively breast fed’ via a bottle.

I had always looked forward to experiencing motherhood and that included breastfeeding. But after a rough

entry into this world, my little girl struggled to latch so I started expressing for her. It was supposed to be a temporary fix until I could establish breastfeeding, as I had all the support possible (my mum is a midwife and lactation consultant), but nothing helped. A visit to a specialist at three months gave us no answers about our lack of latch, and that was the nail in the coffin. From that point forward, what was meant to be a short-term solution turned into a much longer commitment.

I have now reached the milestone of ten

months pumping and aim to make it to at least a year. The journey hasn’t been all smooth sailing though. Initially I felt a huge sense of sadness and frustration towards my inadequacy and inability to feed my baby. With every failed attempt at feeding came not only the sadness but also a feeling of missing out on breastfeeding my baby, and the bond that comes with it.

I have approached bottle feeding as though I were breastfeeding. I am the main feeder with the odd feed done by my husband. I hold her as though we are

breastfeeding and hold the bottle for her rather than letting her feed herself. I try to interact with her while feeding; she likes to play with my face and hair. At times she even goes on 'side strikes' and will only feed facing a certain way, or only if I'm standing and walking. Recently she's starting wanting to switch sides mid feed. I know it will never live up to what I wanted out of breastfeeding but we've done our best to make it as close to it as possible.

The first three months of pumping are hard, you are literally tied to a machine as this is the crucial time when your milk supply is established. I spent a lot of time loathing my pump, sitting bitterly pumping and wanting to throw the machine at the wall. I've heard parents comment on how time-consuming breastfeeding is and how draining it is to feel like they are constantly attached to their baby. As much as I appreciate that this may have been true and breastfeeding can be hard work, it did frustrate me to hear this. When you breastfeed you are attached to a human, you are forming connections, building relationships and bonding. Pumping is the exact opposite; it is a machine, often attached to a power socket, often removed from social situations and hidden in a bedroom, and it's completely non-interactive, unappreciative, and unresponsive. I know what I would rather be attached to!

Investing in a smaller pump with the option of running off batteries really helped me to regain a bit of my freedom. Being an exclusive pumper doesn't mean you need to stop living your life, it just means you need to organise and plan a bit more. At eight weeks, in the midst of three-hourly pumping, around the clock, I travelled to Australia for a wedding and managed to stick to my pumping schedule. It involved a very specific pumping plan that stated when and where to pump, carefully calculated bottles, ice packs and cooler bags. The main difficulty was pumping in public places like airports and planes. There has been a lot of work done to normalise breastfeeding outside the comfort of your own home but this isn't the case for pumping on the go! Since then I have pumped at beaches, in cars, at rivers, car



Emily and Ada (eight months) Walking Sawcut Gorge in Marlborough

parks and anywhere else necessary, all thanks to my handy portable electric pump, the use of a feeding cover and a bit of planning.

Not only has my pump investment been a saviour but my husband has been too. Pumping, just like breastfeeding, is made a lot easier with a good support person. My husband (among others) has helped by bringing me food and drink while I pump, helped massage out any lumps while pumping, in the early days he cleaned all the bits and pieces and best of all, feeding our girl while I pumped in the small hours of the morning.

Good support definitely helped me make it this far. Another important thing has been setting myself achievable goals along the way. Initially my plan was to pump until the 'fix it all' specialist appointment at three months, this then moved to the six month mark which, upon completion, became the big goal of one year. As this milestone quickly approaches I'm now deciding what my next step is, as much as I'd love to never

pump again, I'm currently leaning towards letting my girl self-wean as some choose to do with their breastfed babies. I've lasted a year, so what's another few months?

For someone considering exclusively pumping, please be aware it is not the easy solution to breastfeeding problems. If you are like me and really don't want to use formula, give breastfeeding the best shot you can before chucking in the towel and switching to pumping. Breastfeeding takes hard work, it may take eight weeks to fully establish it so please keep up the awesome work, get support and help and then, if all fails, know that pumping is an option.

I believe pumping is something you have to be 100% determined and motivated to do in order to succeed. I am no saint or super mum. In the beginning it was the thought of letting people down that made me keep going. My daughter, my family, experts who had invested time to help me to breastfeed, my mum (breastfeeding guru) and myself. My

mum would have supported me with whatever I decided to do but the thought of me giving her granddaughter formula over breast milk was not very appealing to her. After I made it through the gruelling first three months it was merely the refusal to be beaten by the machine after investing so much. My competitive, stubborn nature kicked in. Now it's just part of my life, routine and automatic. That said, I still do look forward to the day when I can stop!

Pumping does have its perks that I feel are important to mention. I can have a drink with dinner and time it around my pumping schedule to not affect my milk. I can get a little bit more sleep at night if my husband does a feed. I can feed her on the go, in the car or in the front pack. There's no mixing of formula and needing hot water as fresh breast milk is fine at room temperature for around four hours. I am starting to return for a few days of work and my mind is at ease knowing she will easily feed from a bottle. I'm sure there are others but these are the few key things that have helped to keep me going.

Before June 28th, 2013 I had never considered a third option when feeding my baby. It is not common and there doesn't seem to be much literature out there about exclusive pumping. Also there doesn't seem to be a lot of research into long term pumping and all that goes with it. Guidelines for storing milk safely are constantly changing and I've been given numerous times to work with depending who I've talked to. There are a few online support groups popping up that are good to dip into for inspiration and motivation.

I hope that my experiences with exclusive pumping could help others who are heading down the same path. As I said earlier I am no saint or supermum, I just want others to know it is a viable and possible option for those who are unable to breastfeed and want to avoid formula. It takes time, determination, organisation, and many tears (any exclusive pumper knows it is okay to cry over spilt milk!) but it is worth it. My disappointment in failing to breastfeed is lessened as I know I have given my daughter the best start possible even if it's not the most conventional. ♥

✱ BOOK REVIEW

Exclusively Pumping Breast Milk (2nd ed.)

Stephanie Casemore

Gray Lion Publishing, Ontario, Canada, 2014

Reviewed by Robin Jones Greif and Rosemary Gordon

This interesting book undoubtedly fills a niche market that while relatively small, has been greatly underserved. It arose from the author's own experience of having her first child born at 31 weeks; despite her best efforts she was not able to establish a breastfeeding relationship

with her son, but he still was fed on her expressed milk for his first year of life. Casemore was able to breastfeed her second baby who was born between the writing of the two editions. Her personal breastfeeding experience has benefitted this book by broadening her scope and increasing her awareness of the difference between breastfeeding and breast milk feeding.

The author starts by making her case for exclusively pumping when, for whatever reason, breastfeeding can't/isn't happening, or for women who actively choose to not breastfeed their babies, but want them to have the benefits of their milk as opposed to formula. She makes a clear case for the time and dedication that this will involve and exclusively pumping is definitely not presented as some sort of easy option for women who are considering not breastfeeding, while at the same time she argues that exclusively pumping should be actively promoted as a realistic alternative to formula.

Anyone reading this book would gain an excellent understanding about how lactation is initiated and maintained, about breast milk composition and its normal changes and the importance of what you do (or don't do) during that critical time period in the first few days after birth that can have such a profound effect on breast milk production success months down the track. Casemore goes through the ins and outs of pumps: types, pros and cons of various systems, care and maintenance and tips for making pumping manageable. She does not give prescriptive instructions for scheduling/times, but she gives such a good overview of the basic commitment required that women would be left in no doubt about the time needed to achieve their aim of exclusive breast milk feeding. But she remains unremittingly positive that this is a 'doable' goal and one well worth pursuing.

Besides basic time management skills, the author covers the emotional investment that women will need to make and offers constructive suggestions on gaining the support and understanding they will need in order to cope. From her experience as well as from the many mothers who visit her website, she knows that many people will not understand why anyone would want to feed their baby by bottle feeding their breast milk ('why don't you just breastfeed?' or 'why not just use formula?' being the two most frequent responses that may need countering). But she is passionate about the benefits and virtues of breast milk and firmly believes that all the time and effort pays off big time in improved health for babies.

Premature babies admitted to the NICU merit their own chapter as of course they should since many women who end up weaning early or never manage to breastfeed had babies born too soon. This chapter is full of useful advice written from the point of view of one who has been there herself. She provides a wealth of useful other sources for mothers to follow up on including links to hands on pumping, kangaroo care and laid back breastfeeding.

The last chapter on weaning is of course a bit different than one found in a typical breastfeeding book since weaning from a pump is a different process from baby-led breastfeeding. Because women totally control their own supply when pumping it is possible to make a conscious decision about when to start winding down production.

This book is suitable for inclusion in LLL Group Libraries due to the underlying pro-mother/baby philosophy as expressed by the author. However, it should not supersede other breastfeeding/parenting books if funds are an issue. It would though, be an excellent resource book for Leaders who may wish to lend it to women who contact them. It would also be useful for women who find they have to pump more than they thought they might when they go back to work, as much of her expressing guidance could be tailored to part-time breastfeeding.

Available from LLNZshop.org.nz or email orders@lalecheleague.org.nz.

A GUIDE TO PROVIDING EXPRESSED BREAST MILK FOR YOUR BABY

