

Halton Breastfeeding and Infant Feeding Services

Jade and Nora

As a first-time mum I didn't want to put too much pressure on myself to exclusively breast feed, but I was very keen to give it a try.

Also, when my daughter (Nora) had her newborn infant checks they found a fairly big tongue tie (80%). I was told she would most likely cause me a lot of pain latching and wouldn't breastfeed well.

But initially she did great. With a bit of support and some checks from the infant feeding team she we took to it great, and we were exclusively breastfeeding with no pain and gaining weight very well.

However, it wasn't long until she started having a few issues. She fed very frequently which was normal for a newborn but what others described as cluster feeding was our norm all around the clock most days. She wouldn't sleep flat at all!

Only upright on me or her dad or in her chair. She threw up A LOT. About 10-15 smaller amounts and then a very larger amount every evening.

And she screamed for 2 hours every night like clockwork from 6 until 8. I am a nurse as well as nervous first-time mum, so I reported all these symptoms numerous times to midwives, health visitors, the feeding team and the GP as well as going to A&E twice before she turned 3 months. Sadly, I was often given unhelpful advice, her feeding pattern was "normal infant feeding", "babies do vomit" and "babies do cry". Others were more helpful. Baby massage and warm deeps baths worked great for her discomfort and the feeding team kindly sent the referral for her tongue tie to be cut (after the hospital had failed to).

The GP prescribed some Gaviscon to try improving her reflux symptoms and reassured me most of these issues were likely linked to her tongue tie, but it was a 6-8 week wait for the procedure. So, in the meantime I also trialled removing various allergens from my diet trying to rule out other causes to no avail.

Eventually we had the tongue tie cut at 11 weeks but by this time Nora's symptoms were much worse. Her latch had become very shallow, she was still feeding every 60-90 mins in the day, and she appeared much more uncomfortable when feeding, and would only feed for 5 mins at most appearing to only feed through my let-down and then stop. I reported my concerns again but was hopeful it would all improve with her new and improved tongue.



Sadly, when I immediately fed her post procedure, I didn't feel much difference at all and she fed maybe a few minutes longer. The team at Alder Hey explained that there was still a part of her tie remaining but that particular staff member was not confident enough to cut it all that day as there was a risk of damaging the blood supply to her tongue. They explained her tongue function may just need time to improve as she learns to use it or that a second procedure may be necessary.

Over the following weeks I was concerned her symptoms were not improving and raised this again with the infant feeding and again with my health visitor but was advised to give her more time to 'learn to use her new tongue'.

After four weeks of minimal change my health visitor weighed Nora and it showed her weight gain was slowing so she referred me to a breastfeeding councillor. She also suggested I eat more in case my supply wasn't enough. I was frustrated that my concerns only seemed to be taken more seriously now the numbers on a scale were saying the same. But mostly I was devastated I could be the problem and terrified she would end up hospitalised.

So, the following week I continued to try introducing a bottle to try top up. We had been trying this for weeks with no luck and a lot of tears and frustration. But 9 different bottle brands later we seemed to have a breakthrough and she began taking 1oz of expressed breast milk every day for 4 days prior to my breastfeeding Councillor appointment.

When I met with the breast-feeding councillor, we went through lots of details about Nora's feeding including my diet (she reassured me I was not starving her), feeding cues, time spent skin to skin, our new bottle use, and her tongue function which I felt was still an issue.

However, as I was so frustrated, upset and stressed by this point everything we spoke about felt like more conflicting advice and like I was being told it was all my fault and I didn't know how to feed my baby, so I spent the full hour session sobbing. She suggested some breastfeeding support groups and classes (one of which I had attended once and not found much help) but she also was the first person to suggest seeing a lactation consultant.

I jumped at the chance, and we were booked in for the following week. As much as the councillor tried to reassure me that day and over the following days my confidence was at an all-time low with breastfeeding. I cried every day. I doubted my ability to feed her.

I obsessed over feed times on my feeding tracker app. Trying to teach her how to deepen her latch was futile and so distressing for the both of us. I tried every feeding position I had been shown and I felt like I was doing them all wrong.

My partner's new involvement in feeding had stopped again as I was scared the bottles were making it worse. I felt like I had no idea what to do for the best, everyone had a different opinion for me, and I was very lonely.

Finally, when I saw the lactation consultant, she agreed that her tongue function was most likely the cause of our issues, not anything I was doing and that a second procedure could be beneficial but sometimes this still did not improve feeding.

I felt relieved and angry at the same time especially when she explained I could have been referred to her a lot sooner. By this point my daughter was over 4 months old and I had been reporting these concerns for months. But mostly I just felt heard and hopeful again that something could be done to help.

She reassured me that my daughter's weight was not a huge concern and gave me practical advice to take forward such as, pumping 1 - 2 times daily to protect my supply, continue with Gaviscon and continue trying to introduce the bottle if it helped us as a family and helped get any extra calories into my daughter. We also had weekly appointments to discuss any changes and monitor her weight.

After another few weeks we had our second tongue tie procedure. Straight away Nora started wiggling her tongue around her mouth and seemed amazed by it.

We continued with weekly lactation consultant appointments for a few weeks but were discharged as things improved. I finally I felt like we had turned a corner. Nora looked comfortable feeding, her latch deepened, she fed longer, she kept more milk down and her weight gain began improving again. I felt so relieved!

Nora is now over 6 months old, and we have begun the exciting process of baby led weaning, she also takes a bottle from time to time, she loves drinking from her cup, but we are mostly still breastfeeding and have no plans to stop any time soon.

We have carried on seeing our breastfeeding support group which is helpful for practical tips but also for the psychological and emotional support it offers. My confidence breastfeeding has slowly regained, and I now love it again!

This whole experience has taught me to push further when I feel my concerns are not taken seriously, to trust my instincts and try being kind to myself. Being a breastfeeding mum is very hard at times but with the right support it can be a beautiful fulfilling journey for you and your baby.

After Jade shared her story for breastfeeding week, she has given me consent to include her story in our patient experience report and to use for training purposes to help staff better understand how to support breastfeeding mothers and the importance of following the breastfeeding pathway.