



Breastfeeding mamas, you're not alone! **SIMONE CASEY** has this advice for tapping into your support networks

Your SUPPORT CREW

The ones who know it gets better, realise persisting is something you'll never regret, and who can recount the discovery that breastfeeding can be rewarding for both mama and bubba once issues have been sorted. These mums may include your own mum, your mother-in-law, sisters, cousins, friends or peer-support volunteers.

Studies show that support from other mums significantly increases breastfeeding duration and exclusivity, with one bit of Canadian research showing that almost 20 per cent more mums would be fully breastfeeding at three months if they had peer support compared to those women without support. Australia's first randomised controlled trial focusing on this issue is currently on the way, with the RUBY (Ringing Up about Breastfeeding early) study testing the effectiveness of peer support for breastfeeding. "In Australia, while most women start breastfeeding, many stop sooner than they'd planned, and despite many interventions, increasing breastfeeding rates has remained

challenging," says Fiona McLardie-Hore, co-ordinator of the RUBY study, which is run by The Royal Women's Hospital in Melbourne and La Trobe University. "We know many mothers don't seek the support they need to continue breastfeeding their babies. If proactive peer support can be shown to improve outcomes, it can be incorporated into routine maternity care in Australia."

Ten times! To teach dads how to support their partners in breastfeeding, dad-of-four Warwick Shanks even produced an informative DVD called *Blokes, Babies, Breastfeeding* (Warwick Shanks, 2007). "Although many of us blokes don't know it, as dads we have a real role to play in breastfeeding," he says. Some of his suggestions include getting guys to prepare a comfy feeding place in front of the TV or a window and bring food and water during breastfeeding to relax their partners and aid the let-down reflex. "This isn't just about being a nice guy," says Warwick, "it's a really important physical part of the process." Another job he gives dads is to manage visitors, as it can be easier for them to say "no" when mummies need their space while establishing breastfeeding.

It may be a good idea to discuss your breasts' new role in providing nourishment for your baby with your partner, and be aware that it might take a while for him to adjust to them not being 'his' anymore (particularly if you find you prefer them to be a no-go zone during foreplay). Remind him that this isn't forever and to be patient.

Yes, breastfeeding can be overwhelming at times. Your bundle of joy has a tiny tummy that needs filling frequently and getting your milk into her isn't always simple.

Some mums can get sore or cracked nipples when they're still learning to perfect bub's attachment, others struggle with milk coming in and maintaining supply, others have babies with a range of issues which can mean breastfeeding gets off to a rocky start. Having the right support through these trying times is vital, as calm persistence usually pays off in the end. Here's who to turn to...

"Studies show that support from other mums significantly increases breastfeeding duration"



MUM-TO-MUM SUPPORT

Want to know that there's light at the end of the tunnel? Need someone to calm you down when panic (and tears) set in? Turn to other mums who have been there, done that.



DADS HAVE A ROLE AS WELL

Just as important as peer support is partner support. If your partner is feeling a bit left out at bub's meal times, let him know his role is crucial – some studies show that women are 10 times more likely to breastfeed if their partners are supportive.



GET THE OLDIES ON SIDE

Bub's grandparents may be besotted, but perhaps a bit quick to recommend the bottle when breastfeeding seems difficult. Australia's breastfeeding rates were poorest in the 70s, so many of today's grandparents didn't breastfeed and aren't sure how best to support their daughters or daughters-in-law in doing so.

Jessica Leonard from the Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) says communication is key here. "Having a really honest, frank discussion with grandparents about how important breastfeeding is to you can be really helpful," she says. "Let them know that you think they've done a great job raising their children and it's your turn now." You can point prospective nans and pops in the direction of great reading material and >

let them know they can help. Perhaps leave out a copy of one of *PP*'s breastfeeding features, or buy a copy of the ABA's *Especially for Grandparents* booklet (\$5 from www.mothersdirect.com.au). "Often the best way for grandparents to provide practical breastfeeding support is to help with washing or hanging out a load of clothes, doing a sink full of dishes or filling the freezer with meals," Jessica says, but make sure these are tasks they're happy to help with and that they also get plenty of fun and beautiful bonding time with you and bub.

Of course, many grandparents did breastfeed, and history shows that breastfeeding does run in families. "First-time mums who have grown up watching their siblings, cousins and friends being breastfed often say when they go to feed their own baby, they can think back and picture what breastfeeding looks like and that it makes the whole experience less daunting for them," says Jessica. If this hasn't been your experience growing up, don't despair! If you really want to breastfeed, educating yourself about breastfeeding before you have your baby and surrounding yourself with other breastfeeding mums once bub comes along is a really good start.



LET YOUR THUMBS DO THE TALKING

Mums today have access to a huge breastfeeding support network through their smartphones, tablets and computers. Somewhere out in cyberland, there'll be a mum just like you, struggling with the same issues, maybe even at the same time. Places to visit include lactation-focused forums on websites, as well as the Facebook pages and general sites of groups including the ABA, along with baby experts and lactation consultants. Post a desperate message for support at 2am and chances are there'll be other mums up feeding to act as your mummy cheer squad! "I've certainly found a lot of solidarity from

reading links, posts, articles and blogs about breastfeeding," says Sarah Jefford, mum to Archie, three, and Rafael, seven months. "Much of my mummy network is online, so in the early months I didn't really talk about breastfeeding with people in real life. I would say that social media has had a huge impact on my confidence to breastfeed and to breastfeed in public as well."



IT TAKES A VILLAGE...

It can be reassuring to know your wider community is nodding in agreement when you're out and about feeding or expressing for your baby. The ABA offers several ways to help breastfeeding mums feel comfortable when shopping, dining out or working, such as the 'Breastfeeding Welcome Here' stickers available for cafés and other venues and the Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace accreditation program. There are also local get-togethers around the country. "An ABA group meeting can be

a really great place to start and get your confidence up," says Jessica. "There's always a diverse range of mums to get support and different experiences from." To find your local group, see www.breastfeeding.asn.au/contacts/groups.

For professional support, a private lactation consultant could be your saviour and sometimes can mean the difference between continuing breastfeeding or giving up – so it can be well worth a call-out fee for a visit in the comfort of your own home. You can visit www.lcanz.org or search for a lactation consultant with an IBCLC qualification in your area.

With the right support crew around you, whether it's your nearest and dearest, strangers sitting behind computers on the other side of the word, or expert consultants, your chances of breastfeeding success grow. Remember, we're all in this together! ★

"Mums today have access to a huge breastfeeding support network through their computers"

FORMULA-FEEDING MUMS NEED SUPPORT TOO!

Being a new parent is an emotional time and all mums need their feeding choices validated by those closest to them. *PP*'s child health nurse Jan Murray, author of *Mum, Baby & Toddler: Together We Learn* (\$29.95 from www.settlepetal.com), offers these tips:

- 1 Make sure you and your health professionals are on the same page. "Find a child health nurse who supports the relationship between you and your baby," says Jan. If your health nurse visit leaves you feeling upset about no longer breastfeeding, it may be time to seek out another health professional. Same with GPs.
- 2 Feel confident in your decision to formula-feed and concentrate on building a bond with your baby. "You can develop beautiful attachment while bottle-feeding," says Jan. "You hold your baby and look at her in the same way as a mum who is breastfeeding."
- 3 See if your local chemist can help. "Some states have child health nurses working out of pharmacies," says Jan. "These nurses usually have a good knowledge of infant formula that is available."
- 4 Communicate with your family about your decisions. "Talk to your partner and family members about why you're wanting to formula feed rather than breastfeed," says Jan. If they can understand where you are coming from, "they're often more supportive".
- 5 Peer support is important. Most new mums are allocated a mothers' group and it's nice to have other mums with similar-age babies to socialise and chat to about baby milestones or feeding issues. "Every mothers' group is different, but some are a great support for formula-feeding as well as breastfeeding," says Jan. "They understand."

The National Health and Medical Research Council recommends babies be exclusively breastfed until around six months of age and that breastfeeding is continued until 12 months of age and beyond, for as long as mum and child desire. While breastfeeding is the ideal way to nourish your baby, we recognise not all mums are able to do so. If you have any concerns about your breastfed or bottle-fed baby, make an appointment with your child health nurse or GP.