

Successful Breastfeeding Journey of Baby Vivienne (26 weeks 830g)

As with most NICU mom's, the act of breastfeeding did not occur right at birth. There were a lot of steps leading up to the act of breastfeeding. The first step was expressing the colostrum. I had some idea of what it was but wasn't aware of the full importance of it.



Thank goodness for the post-partum nurse and especially for Sandy, the lactation consultant who helped get the ball rolling. Since I didn't deliver at JGH, Sandy and I "met" through a phone call when my husband was on a milk run (transporting those few precious drops of colostrum from St-Mary's Hospital to the JGH). Sandy provided instructions and highlighted the importance of pumping from the get go, minimum 8 times daily with a goal of ~800mL by the end of 2-3 weeks. Religiously, I pumped those 8 times daily, every 2-3 hours I would pump. Life revolved around the pumping schedule and the NICU visit. I kept hydrated with water and tried to eat some of the known lactogenic foods such as oats, dates, avocados, etc.

I didn't get to do kangaroo care with Vivienne until about two weeks after her birth as she wasn't stable enough and was still intubated. It was hard not to be able to hold her. My partner and I kept asking when she would be extubated as in our minds that was when we would be able to do kangaroo care with her. We had read about all the positives of kangaroo care for the baby as well as for breastfeeding. It turned out she would still be intubated when I first held her in kangaroo care. I remember being excited, emotional and nervous. She was so tiny and I was afraid of accidentally extubating her. Sandy had checked in at various times throughout this time to help me reach the pumping goal and gave me pointers on how to express more milk. The NICU team was great, if I needed to talk with anyone, it was always possible.

Around the time when Vivienne was "old" enough to be put on the breast, the whole NICU team was very encouraging with putting Vivienne on the breast so that she could explore. This was a great way to start. When she got to the point where she would start latching, it was a struggle. We worked with Sandy to find a good position that would work for us. Sandy soon detected a tongue-tie in Vivienne which was added to the

problem. After Vivienne had her tongue tie clipped, I thought it would be smooth sailing. I had failed to realize that breastfeeding is a skill that needed to be practiced and perfected. We eventually found a position that worked for us, a reclined cross cradle. Even then, Vivienne wasn't taking her full feed on the breast, we slowly moved from breastfeeding-finishing the feed by gavage to breastfeeding-bottle feeding the rest. She wasn't fully on the breast until two months after being discharged from the hospital, partly due to the fact that she was discharged with a formula prescription for an extra calorie boost which meant it needed to be delivered by a bottle.

We are now 3.5 months since being discharged and Vivienne is exclusively breastfeeding and following her growth curve. We have switched to the biological/ laid back position which was a lot easier to be in once Vivienne was able to hold her head. This position was suggested early on but I found it was hard to get Vivienne to latch as she lacked head control. We still have good days and bad days but we work on it together.

As for tips and tricks:

Pumping

- Start as soon as you can
- Be diligent with the 8 pumps/day (either set a schedule and stick to it, including nightly pumps or be aware of the clock and pump at minimum every 3 hours)
- Buy a freezer if you can
- Freeze full bottles to maximize storage space
- Consider donating to Héma-Québec

Breastfeeding

- Start early
- Kangaroo as much as possible
- Get comfortable
- Practice
- Be patient
- Don't be afraid to ask for help

