

Lyla's Tongue-tie

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Lyla's birth was beautiful. She nursed immediately and I thought we were off to a great start. By the next morning, though, I felt that something was just not right.

Lyla was born on a Saturday morning. We went home the next day and by Monday morning I was in so much pain that the thought of nursing her terrified me. I was determined to stick it out. I telephoned a lactation consultant, who is also a La Leche League Leader, and while I waited for her to arrive, I pumped and fed Lyla what little colostrum I got with a spoon. When she arrived, she handled Lyla gently, had her suck on a gloved finger and looked at her mouth.

The diagnosis was that Lyla was tongue-tied and it was keeping her from being able to nurse effectively as she could not draw my nipple far enough into her mouth to get any milk. The tip of her tongue was heart shaped because of her tight frenulum and she had lost 14% of her body weight since birth. I felt awful as though I were starving her.

I was determined to avoid formula milk. So, while we waited to get an appointment for a frenotomy, I wore a nipple shield and pumped in between feedings. If my baby was not nursing, I was pumping. I was attached to either my baby or a pump during all daytime hours. I used a syringe to give her the expressed milk in the side of her mouth as she nursed.

We took Lyla to the pediatrician on Wednesday for the frenotomy. Our LLL Leader was in contact with me by phone almost daily to make sure we were doing OK.

When, on Saturday, Lyla still hadn't had a bowel movement and was still nursing constantly, it was decided that a further frenotomy was required to free her tongue enough to nurse effectively.

Up to this point I had told anyone who would listen about our experience. While well meaning,



Photo: Stephanie Dunn & Lyla, courtesy of Stephanie Dunn

I just couldn't bear to hear another person say, "Just give her a bottle."

The procedure was over in a matter of minutes, and the doctor wanted me to nurse without the nipple shield immediately afterward to help the healing. I was amazed at how much different it felt! I had to weigh Lyla frequently and continue with the pumping and supplementing until she learned how to latch and suck well. Slowly but surely her weight gain crept up and I was able to wean her off the supplements and the nipple shield. I was still pretty sore when she first latched on but it was improving, so I was pleased.

That first two weeks that everyone says to push through took me closer to five. And that "free" breastfeeding cost us almost \$400 in the first two weeks between the lactation consultant and the second frenotomy that we had to pay for out of pocket. It was challenging and I can't tell you how many times I said, "There's no end in sight!" and mentally decided that if it weren't better in three days I was done. I would hit that three-day mark and realize how much time and effort I had put in, and decide to push forward.

We're now six weeks out and I'm a regular breastfeeding mom! My baby will breastfeed for 20 minutes every two hours or so, and I can just pop her on whenever she wants. She still cluster feeds quite a bit but that's perfectly fine now that I know she's getting my milk. John gives her a couple bottles a week of expressed breastmilk to keep her used to that since I'll be going back to school in a month and she does great with that. We're pretty much perfect when it comes to breastfeeding! I swear I never thought I'd be able to say that!

I love so much about nursing my baby (the first of three that I've succeeded in breastfeeding) but I think my favorite thing has been the way mothers rally around each other with support. I have gotten so many phone calls, emails and hugs from others who have been through similar situations. Mothers have offered to take the older girls out for a while or come play with them so I didn't feel guilty about not being able to give them as much time as I wanted to. People have offered resources, given phone numbers to call, websites to look at, and names of others to talk to. And it's great advice to accept help if it's offered.

It's time to end my story now because my baby wants to nurse and I want to stare into her eyes as my baby nourishes hers.



See Tongue-tie and the Breastfed Baby
<http://tinyurl.com/7s73eeb>