

**Ep #83: Breastfeeding Isn't Mandatory
(And You're Not a Bad Parent If You Don't)**

PARENTHOOD PREP

with

Devon Clement



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If you're expecting a baby, I'm sure a lot of people have asked you if you're planning to breastfeed, chest feed, body feed. And there's a lot of reasons to do it, but there's also a lot of reasons not to. And we're going to talk about some of those today. And at the end of the day, it's really just about what you want to do. So stay tuned.

Welcome to *Parenthood Prep*, the only show that helps sleep-deprived parents and overwhelmed parents-to-be successfully navigate those all-important early years with their baby, toddler, and child. If you are ready to provide the best care for your newborn, manage those toddler tantrums, and grow with your child, you're in the right place. Now here's your host, baby and parenting expert, Devon Clement.

Hello, hello. Here we are again with the *Parenthood Prep* podcast. I am once again so excited to be talking to you today. Today on the podcast, I want to talk about a pretty hot topic, which is breastfeeding, body feeding, chest feeding, whatever you feel the most comfortable calling it. We all know what it is. It's your body after having a baby produces milk and you feed the baby that milk, whether you feed it from your body or whether you feed it from a bottle by extracting the milk, pumping, whatever. That is what we're talking about. And there's a lot of reasons to do that. There are, and you can read about any of them on the internet or in a book or I'm sure your doctor shared with you some of them.

But today, I'm going to talk about some reasons why you might not want to breastfeed, body feed, chest feed when you have a new baby. And there are quite a few good reasons not to do it. And there's also quite a few reasons that I think people think are reasons not to do it that aren't. And if that was unclear, I will clear it up when we get to the end here. But for now, I'm just going to start with a couple of reasons why you just might not want to do that. And it's totally okay.

Something I've really noticed in the last, I don't know, six or eight years is that when I ask my potential clients, are you planning on breastfeeding? Just for

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planning purposes and letting their caregivers know and stuff like that. They've started to say, I'm going to give it a try, but if it doesn't work, I'm okay with that. And I just love that attitude of like, I'm not tying any of my worth or my value to how my body produces milk or how my baby takes milk from my body. It's just either going to happen or it's not, and I'm okay either way.

And I really love that because I think for so long there was a lot of pressure one way, then there was a lot of pressure the other way. Then it swung back. The pressure was back on the original way. And I just think people should be able to do whatever feels good to them and whatever makes sense for them. Listen, it is really hard to have a brand new baby. It is hard to give birth to a baby. It is hard to adopt a baby or have a baby via surrogacy. It is hard to deal with a newborn. You don't want to give yourself additional stress on top of that. So we want to really eliminate the things that are going to be sources of stress for you. Now, I'm not saying that body feeding is going to be stressful for everyone, but there are some people that it is stressful for, and then it's a perfectly good reason not to do it.

So my first reason is you're data oriented, you like to know numbers, you want to know specifically how much your baby is eating. And it creates a lot of anxiety for you if you don't know. Instinctively, I think our primal parenting instinct is feed the baby. Feed the baby. Make sure the baby's fed. Make sure the baby is growing. Make sure they have enough to eat. It's why the trope and the stereotype of grandmothers is that they're always trying to shove food in you because we just want to keep the people that we're responsible for our children, our grandchildren fed. We want everybody to be fed.

And yeah, there's no markers on the side of your breast that say how many ounces have gone into the baby. There are signs that you can look for that can be really useful. But if you're a person who just wants to know how many ounces did they consume at this feeding, then you're going to feel more comfortable feeding from the bottle, whether that's breast milk or formula or whatever. Really know those are your two choices. I don't know what else you would put in a

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bottle for a brand new baby. Don't put anything else in besides breast milk or formula, please.

Another reason you might not want to breastfeed is if you're on a medication that is counter indicated for breastfeeding. There are some that are, there are some that they're not sure about. There's a lot of good resources out there like LactMed and things like that where you can look up whether your medication is compatible with breastfeeding or not. But if it's not, there is no reason to not take a medication that's going to help your physical or mental health just so that you can feed your baby from your body. It is totally fine to make that choice. And speaking of your mental health, some people's mental health really suffers. There's a lot of different reasons hormonal. There's actually something called DMER, D-M-E-R, dysphoric milk ejection reflex that when the milk comes out of your body, you actually get sad. You just feel emotionally sad. And there's no reason for you to deal with that if you don't want to. If you want to, it's fine, but if you don't want to, that's also totally fine.

I was talking to a friend recently who's pregnant with her second baby and we were talking about nursing and I know that she nursed her first for about six months. And she said she wasn't planning on doing it this time around because even though the experience felt good in the moment, when she was done, when she stopped nursing and the baby was formula fed, she felt so much more normal and like herself in a way that she hadn't even realized she wasn't feeling. So for that whole six months that she was breastfeeding, she had a newborn, she had baby blues, all this different stuff, she was overtired. So she just chalked her weird feelings up to that. And then she said it was like night and day, when she stopped nursing, she just felt so much more mentally healthy. And that is absolutely a reason not to do it the second time around or if you are aware of it while you're in the moment that you're just not feeling mentally yourself, that is absolutely a reason to stop. You are allowed to stop if you are just feeling like it is not helping your mental health.

You know, there's other struggles too. You might find it's really painful, like toe curling pain. You don't have to tolerate that. I mean, definitely see a lactation

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consultant if that's the case because it could be pretty easily fixed. But if you've been working with support people and it's just not getting you where you want to go and you're getting more frustrated and every time you go to nurse your baby, you're feeling dread and sadness and frustration and anger and whatever else, you don't want to be doing that. There is nothing in formula that is going to be worse for your baby than having a parent who is absolutely miserable. It is absolutely a good choice.

Sometimes it's not painful. Sometimes it's going okay and you just don't like it. It's just not for you. You're not happy. That is also totally fine. And I wish more people talked about, I think a lot of people will sort of use it's not working well as a reason to stop when actually the reason to stop is that they just don't want to. And I wish more people were honest about that. I know that a lot of the time it means that you're going to be sort of given a hard time by the people in your life, other moms, other parents. You're worried that you might be frowned upon, but you can just say it's not for you. And then other people might be like, "Oh, you know what? It wasn't for me either."

And if you have a bad experience the first time around and you just don't want to go through it again, that's also totally fine. We had a client a few years ago who reached out to us before her second baby was born and honestly, her inquiry made me so sad because she put in there, she's like, "I'm not planning to breastfeed and I want to know that I'm working with someone who is not going to make me feel bad about that." And I just can't believe she even had to consider that as a possibility because I know there's a lot of people out there who will make you feel bad about it. Be with the people who are not going to do that, who are not going to make you feel guilty. There are enough things to feel guilty about without other people making you feel shitty for a choice that you have made.

And the last reason, I will say I probably would not have recorded this podcast episode 10 years ago, certainly not 10 years ago, maybe not even like eight years ago or six years ago, because back then the formula sucked. It just really was like pretty crappy. And we really wanted babies to be fed better and have

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better nutrition and better quality food than what was on the market then. Listen, I grew up in the 80s, I drank formula, Prosobee or whatever, and I'm fine. I'm not saying that formula is bad or anything like that, but the options were just not amazing.

And now there are so many better choices. You have much easier access to European brands, which, they'll tell you they're not FDA approved, but if they're approved by the FDA in Germany, that's good enough for me personally. Obviously, your mileage may vary and it's up to you and check with your pediatrician, but those are very readily available and babies do really well with it. And as a response, a lot of the US companies that are FDA approved have started making much better quality formulas that just have this like better level of ingredients. I mean, if you've ever been to Europe, you know, the food there is just so much better quality, the vegetables, the fruit, the meat, the bread, the eggs. They just have better farming practices, tougher regulations, and more of honestly, I think a cultural focus on food quality that we just are not as invested in here. But again, I'm seeing that change.

You know, recently I was sleep training a baby. He's seven months old. He's formula fed. And I was taking care of him because his mom had stepped out of the house. And I ended up changing a poopy diaper. And he had, I'm sorry if this is gross, he had some really beautiful poop. It was like exactly what you want to see from a baby his age and what you probably would see from a breastfed or body fed baby. And it was so different from like the old-timey formula like super hard like poop nuggets. It was just lovely, honestly. And I'm sorry if that sounds weird.

So just all the further proof, I forget exactly what brand they were using, but it's one of the newer US brands, the organic, just really good quality. So we have good alternatives now. You do not have to do it if it's not something that feels right for you.

Let's get into some things that are not reasons not to body feed or reasons to stop body feeding. A lot of times people will say this or your mother-in-law will

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say this, even sometimes your pediatrician or your OB or somebody in your life that you think is knowledgeable will say this. You should not stop breastfeeding just because you want your baby to sleep through the night. Breastfed babies absolutely 100% can sleep just as well as formula fed babies. You're going to read some stuff that said the formula is harder to digest, they sleep longer. It's not true. I would say probably half to two-thirds of our sleep training clients are still fully breast milk feeding and their babies are perfectly capable of sleeping through the night. So that is not a reason to stop. If you are enjoying it, it's a good experience and you're liking it, you don't have to stop just because you want your baby to sleep. There's a lot of things that you can do to get your baby sleeping well, even with nursing. And we're going to talk about those on future episodes. I promise. But I will say that overall what I have observed in my many years of doing this is that it's sort of the behaviors of bottle feeding rather than what's in the bottle. So for instance, if you're nursing your baby at bedtime, they finish eating, they fall asleep. They wake up again two hours later, you're like, "Oh, you must not have eaten enough at bedtime. I'm going to nurse you and you'll go back to sleep," and then the baby just nurses all night long. Also, it's easier to nurse when they wake up, right?

If you are feeding a bottle, whether that's a bottle of body milk or formula, you're going to say that at that two-hour mark, "Wait, you had six ounces at bedtime. There's no way you're hungry. I'm going to try to soothe you in different ways to get you back to sleep." And that's what I mean when I say like the bottle feeding behaviors generally are more conducive to sleeping because you're not going to be so quick to feed as a response to every single wakeup.

Another reason not to stop is that you want to share the workload of feeding with your partner, with your family members, with your caregiver. Maybe you're going back to work and the baby's going to be with a nanny or at a daycare or your partner's going to be home with them. You can absolutely do that while you're nursing and while you're body milk feeding. I highly recommend, and I think this is a big mistake that a lot of people make, well-meaning because they want things to go well with nursing so they wait way too long to introduce alternative

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feeding methods to introduce the bottle of breast milk or a formula or whatever. I think the ideal time is sometime around three weeks, like between three and four weeks, assuming things are going smoothly.

You can start pumping, introduce the bottle, or introduce formula if you prefer to do that, and the babies tend to take it really well. There's a lot of talk about nipple confusion, and if you give them the bottle in the beginning, they're never going to want the breast and things like that. And that can be a factor, but what I see way more is people with a six-week-old, an eight-week-old, a 12-week-old, a three-month-old, they're going back to work at the four-month mark or they want to go out to dinner at the six-month mark and the baby won't touch the bottle with a 10-foot pole because they're not used to it. So introduce the bottle, give them one a day or every couple days, get them used to it. You know, three, four-week mark. Then your partner can help, family members can help, babysitters can help, doulas can help, everyone can help. That is absolutely an option and not a reason to stop. So, I hope these were helpful to you.

If you have any questions or comments, I would love to hear them. You can follow us at Happy Family After on Instagram. Leave us your questions and comments. I would love to hear your thoughts. And I will talk to you soon. Bye.

To be sure you never miss an episode, be sure to follow the show in your favorite podcast app. We'd also love to connect with you on social media. You can find us on Instagram @happyfamilyafter or at our website HappyFamilyAfter.com. On our website you can also leave us a voicemail with any questions or thoughts you might have, and you can roast your baby. Talk to you soon.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of *Parenthood Prep*. If you want to learn more about the services Devon offers, as well as access her free monthly newborn care webinars, head on over to www.HappyFamilyAfter.com.