# Giving Up Breastfeeding Made Me a Better Mom. Here's Why

**Written by Madeleine Deliee on May 8, 2018**

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I expected that pregnancy would change my body. I was prepared to give up alcohol, sushi, and high heels. I didn't expect that I'd haveto change my antidepressant. It felt like such a part of my daily existence, it never occurred to me that it would be another sacrifice to The Baby—until my doctor lowered the boom. I would have to drop the drug I'd taken for the past three years, the one that finally, finally worked to relieve the persistent depression I'd wrestled with intermittently throughout my life.

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It was much worse than giving up sushi.

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Wellbutrin, my obstetrician explained—seeming far less concerned about this than I felt was appropriate—was not tested during pregnancy. I'd have to go with something that had a longer track record. It was time to become reacquainted with my old nemesis, Prozac. The one that nullified the depression but also steamrollered absolutely everything else in its wake and left me feeling blank.

Along with all the other changes taking place—the zinging hormones, the growing awareness that I was going to be legitimately responsible for the growth and wellness of another human being—the reintroduction of Prozac felt like replacing a finely honed blade with a chainsaw.

This is where I'm supposed to say that then the baby was born and none of that mattered, that I was so ecstatic over my new motherhood that my depression was vanquished, and the entirety of my son's infancy was draped in gauzy, rosy joy. But that would be a bold-faced lie. My belly was still distended—I looked pregnant for months after delivery—but now it also sported a row of super-hot staples. My son had no interest in sleeping… and then there was the nursing.

Nursing came surprisingly easy for me; we got going without too much frustration and, while it felt like I was constantly feeding my kid, I was OK. I reassured myself that this was one part of being a mother that I was handling just fine. Of course, there was even less sleep, and my nipples cracked and bled.

But then I received the news that the great Wellbutrin ban wasn't over—not even close. Apparently, it also hadn't been proven safe

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demons with a chainsaw. A chainsaw that I can only assume was made by Fisher Price.

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So I conceded to pumping and bottle-feeding. Sleep was at such a premium already, there was no way I was going to sacrifice it entirely. I pumped so my husband could do some of the dark early morning feedings. Sometimes I still hear my very own version of Clarice Starling's lambs—the monotonous drone of the pump that provided the background noise: *waaaaah-wah, waaaaah-wah,* the perfect counterpoint to the numbing Prozac. And still, I worried: Even though it had been battle-tested on lots of other moms and babies, what if I was somehow hurting my son? But I kept taking it. I knew that it was better than not.

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People have so many helpful suggestions when you have a baby: how to get them to sleep, how to stop teething pain... they also want to offer lots (and lots) of well-intentioned ideas about breastfeeding. How long to nurse, how often, the best position, public or private, what to eat and what to avoid, whether it's necessary to "pump and dump," on and on and on.

> **"I had to care for myself first, securing the oxygen firmly over my nose and mouth, so that I could keep going until the world leveled out again."**

There were the people who continually asked me how long I planned to keep going, like I was going to get merit badges for length of service.

There was the person (not a mother herself—in fact, she was a nun) who vehemently informed me just how important breastfeeding was for the baby—the longer, the better—and how damaging it would be to cut this short.

There was the person who talked about the evils of formula. And the one who said that babies wouldn't bond without nursing.

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I was poorly medicated, sleep-deprived, scarred outside and in, and ready to say that something had to give. At this point, I realized that if I kept going the way I had been, I couldn't be the mother I needed to be. The chainsaw medication, the pump that makes me feel like a cow, everyone telling me I'm not doing it right... screw it. The milk train doesn't stop here anymore, I decided.

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So I went back on the meds that helped to take away just the depression, rather than the world. Everything seemed a little brighter and more manageable. I breathed a guilty sigh of relief.

And you know what? My son is fine, despite his truncated access to my boob. Actually, both my kids are: I went through the same routine with my second son, but the second time—as with so many aspects of parenting—I had a better idea of what to expect. Not the least of which was that I would need to care for myself first, securing the oxygen firmly over my nose and mouth, so that I could keep going until the world leveled out again and I was able to land.

*Madeleine Deliee recently wrote about the new Doctor Who, visiting the Anne Frank House, dystopic Young Adult literature, and Wonder Woman's alcoholism. She likes to keep 'em guessing and occasionally tweets @MMDeliee.*

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