

BFREE E-Newsletter

Support for Women Breastfeeding

Twins and Other Multiples

By: Julia Feinstein, BA, CLC

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Original artwork by Dondei Dean



**Creating
Breastfeeding Friendly
Communities**

Breast milk is the ideal nutrition for infants. The current recommendation is that women breastfeed exclusively for the first six months of life and continue to breastfeed for at least a year in addition to feeding solid foods. Many women struggle to meet these recommendations for a number of reasons, but it is especially challenging for mothers of twins and higher order multiples to reach their breastfeeding goals. Given that the number of twin births has risen 72% since 1980 (from 18.9 to 32.6 per 1000 live births), this is a critical issue. Furthermore, since many multiples are delivered prematurely and stay in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) because of increased risk factors, breastfeeding support is essential.

Recent studies have shown that mothers of twins and higher-order multiples breastfeed less often than mothers of singletons. One study found that, in the NICU, twin pregnancy was a significant factor for mothers’ stopping breastfeeding before discharge. Mothers of multiples also have less intention to breastfeed. Reasons for this may include maternal anxiety around having multiples, lack of support from the partner, and reduced milk supply. Since many twins are delivered by caesarean section, maternal pain from surgery can also contribute to lower breastfeeding rates.

Although more research is needed to identify how we can best support mothers of multiples to reach their breastfeeding goals, nevertheless, some current recommendations have been made. These include encouraging mothers to increase their caloric intake by 1200-1500 calories per day and to continue their prenatal vitamins; providing mothers with education about the benefits of breast milk and resources for successful breastfeeding (such as lactation counselors); and increasing support for mothers to allow them time to rest and sleep. Additionally, it can be helpful for mothers of multiples to join support groups to share experiences with other parents, and to visit websites such as Twiniversity, whose founder and CEO we will hear from in this newsletter.

It is our hope that this quarter’s newsletter shines a light on the successes and challenges that mothers of multiples face in reaching their breastfeeding goals.

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Exciting news for 2020!

BFREE has partnered with the Allied Foundation to share their TOLL-FREE SUPPORT LINE with all of our community partners. The support line is:

- Staffed by International Board-Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs)
- Available to ANY family on Long Island

Call the support line to speak with an IBCLC, get information about local support groups, and/or find a lactation consultant to do a home, office, or telemedicine visit.

866-211-0404

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear BFREE Coalition Members,

Happy New Year! We hope you had a great holiday season. We are excited to share the January newsletter with you all. In this issue, we focus on the triumphs and struggles of breastfeeding multiples. We also highlight the upcoming formal workplace recognitions of the Northwell GoHealth Urgent Care Centers as “Breastfeeding Friendly.”

First, we hear from two mothers of twins who work in our office about their personal experiences breastfeeding. We also hear from Natalie Diaz, the founder and CEO of Twiniversity, a resource and support network for parents of twins, on her motivations to create the site.

As always, we are so grateful to the contributors to this edition, to the BFREE Steering Committee for their advice and engagement in our efforts, and to each of you for your passion for breastfeeding support. We welcome any feedback and contribution to future newsletters! Please email your ideas to us at BFREE@northwell.edu.

Many thanks for your time and support!



Henry H. Bernstein, DO, MHCM, FAAP
Principal Investigator
Creating Breastfeeding Friendly Communities

SUCCESS SPOTLIGHT: FIVE GOHEALTH URGENT CARE CENTERS RECEIVE “BREASTFEEDING FRIENDLY”

By: Maggie Sherin, BA, CLC

In November 2019, Northwell Health-GoHealth Urgent Care saw FIVE of its worksites recognized as Breastfeeding Friendly. With the help of the BFREE Team, Northwell Health-GoHealth now provides supervisors with training on how to support breastfeeding employees, and ensures that every employee going on maternity leave has ample information about breastfeeding and local lactation resources. Additionally, despite the limited space in each drop-in center, Northwell Health-GoHealth is committed to providing any breastfeeding employee and patient with a private space to express breast milk upon their request. Although only five sites fell within our catchment areas, these resources are now available in *all* Northwell Health-GoHealth Urgent Care centers on Long Island.

Juliana de Campos, the Project Manager for JV Operations, shared her thoughts on this great achievement: “*Northwell Health-GoHealth Urgent Care values the partnership with BFREE and is excited to have 5 centers formally recognized as Breastfeeding Friendly Worksites. Supplementing our network-wide policies with BFREE’s resources honors our pledge to support the current and future breastfeeding mothers on our team.*”

Congratulations to Northwell Health-GoHealth Urgent Care and thank you for helping to make breastfeeding mothers’ return to work easier!

MOTHERS' PERSPECTIVES

By: Denise Garcia

I didn't have much of a choice about whether or not to breastfeed my twins, since they were preemies and in the NICU. The nurses told me I had to breastfeed because the beginning part of the breastmilk is the best and most nutritious part. However, I had never been educated about breastfeeding before: my mom hadn't breastfed me, I hadn't breastfed in my previous pregnancy, and my obstetrician never talked about it at all. I had no example to follow.



When I first got to the NICU, there was a room with a pump. The nurses hooked me up to a machine and told me they'd be back later, without providing much support or information. I felt like I became a cow. Even in the NICU, there was no information on why breastfeeding was good or important. I was just told I had to do it. I appreciated the pillows and the nurses who helped me breastfeed my babies one at a time, but it was very hard when I went home and the twins were still in the NICU. I didn't qualify for a mechanical pump through Medicaid and they were too expensive to rent, so I only had a manual one, which really hurt. The only information I got about why it hurt was that the suction cup probably didn't fit, but that was the full extent of what I was told; no one ever brought me different suction cups or showed me how to properly pump in a way that wasn't painful. One lady came in and said would be easy to breastfeed at home, but this was not the case.

When the twins were finally able to come home, I tried breastfeeding again and found that my left breast wasn't producing as much as my right. It was very discouraging. I also wasn't eating or drinking enough, and I felt like breastfeeding was physically draining energy out of me and making me lightheaded and dizzy. I was also constantly pumping and my hands and nipples were hurting, while many of my other new-mom friends could just hook up to a mechanical pump. I got very depressed, very angry, and overall experienced a lot of emotions. It was just horrible, wondering why can't I do this? It also never ended: after I was done feeding one, the other would be ready to eat, and so on. I was exhausted.

The entire time, I had so many questions: How would I know if my twins were full? How do I know if anything is coming out? Do I have to take her off? Would the baby let you know they were done? Were they eating enough? Were they gaining

weight? If I had had more information and known that my kids were getting enough milk or been familiar with the signs that they were done, I would have had more confidence in breastfeeding.

In the end, I breastfed the twins for two months but not exclusively. I gave breast and bottle because I wasn't sure if my kids were getting enough. Honestly, I'm proud that I lasted so long but I also think I would have been more successful if both of my breasts had been producing milk. When I decided to stop, my boobs started getting hard and filling up, so I went to my OB, who said to use warm compresses. There was never any conversation of trying to relieve pressure by breastfeeding again.

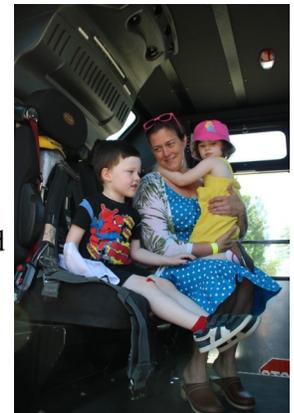
After working at Northwell and hearing the BFREE team talk about breastfeeding and breast milk, I would definitely breastfeed if I had more kids. I know that mechanical pumps are now offered to all women, and that there are more resources available to learn. The BFREE Team is exactly the kind of resource and communication I would have liked to have: doctors oftentimes don't have the time, and nurses have too many responsibilities. New mothers rarely hear "How are you doing? Do you need help? Is it hard for you?" It's amazing that people would take the time to ask that. I feel like all moms- but especially new, low-income, young moms- should be able to get the information you provide and attend the events you hold.

Denise is an Administrative Support Associate in Pediatric Hematology Oncology. She works with us in Suite 311

By: Carina Iezzi

It never occurred to me not to breastfeed. I'm an anthropologist, so I've studied humans from the prehistoric era to now. We are mammals and it's in our nature to breastfeed. I was also on the older side (46) when I had my twins, so I wanted to give them the best nutrition possible. I tried to eat well when nursing — no caffeine, no chocolate, no tea, no aspirin, and no Tylenol.

Again, I was just trying to do the best I could for them.



After I was stitched up from my emergency c-section, the hospital staff put the twins on me and luckily, they latched on and started feeding immediately. It was extremely surreal. When I got home, I began pumping in addition to feeding, so I would feed one, then that one would sleep, and then I would feed the next one, and then I'd pump, and then it would repeat. I went through three breastfeeding pillows. Over time it began to feel dehumanizing. The twins were also on separate schedules for five months, meaning I didn't sleep for five months.

Someone had recommended that I keep a journal for each of my twins, so I created a binder of Excel spreadsheets with schedules for how long they nursed, when they pooped, and when they peed. I entered data as they nursed, and I found it really helpful to see patterns of when they were or weren't eating. When they were ready to sleep train, I was even able to train them to sleep at the same time. Although it was initially extremely tiring, I definitely recommend this to other moms of multiples!

Over time, as I was pumping, I began to notice that I wasn't making as much breastmilk as before. I could see the cream and water layers separate in the fridge, and the cream layer became smaller. The problem was that I wasn't eating enough to produce more milk; at first, it had been easy to eat enough because I'd had help after the twins' birth, but once the help tapered off, I began falling below my starting weight (even after those giant Haagen Dazs containers from BJ's!).

Fortunately, I had frozen breastmilk stored up, so I fed the twins that over the next few months and gradually mixed in formula so that their stomachs wouldn't be upset. At 5.5 months, I introduced them to solid food because they were trying to steal food off my plate!

Going into my breastfeeding journey, I knew I would need support. In addition to talking to friends, who were always a great, social support, another major help for me was the Twins club that I joined. As soon as I learned I was having twins, I read whatever books I could, talked to as many people as I could, and look into clubs, which were great. The president of the club I joined had two sets of twins as well as a singleton and had breastfed them all for years. There were parents of all different backgrounds and twins of many different ages, but everyone was super supportive and had advice to offer. They also understood that you just do what you can, especially for me as a single mom.

While I don't know if I necessarily enjoyed breastfeeding, I enjoyed giving my twins all the immune and health benefits of breast milk. Breastfeeding also made me feel very maternal, peaceful, and centered—a rudimentary sort of mammalian thing. I didn't expect that it would be so fulfilling to be able to nourish my twins. You see them and they seem so happy, and you feel so powerful, almost like Wonder Woman! All I could think was that I gave birth to these two children and now I am feeding them. I'm super glad I did it, even though I wasn't able to do it as long as I had hoped. It was just me with no help, which was pretty rough. But they're healthy — so the breastfeeding couldn't have hurt!

Carina is a Research Assistant in Pediatric Genetics. She works with us in Suite 311.

DELUSIONS OF GRANDEUR: A TWIN MOM EXPERIENCE

By Natalie Dias, CLC, CPST

I suffered with infertility for years. So many years, in fact, that I had time to dream up even the most mundane details of motherhood in hopes that it would someday come true. After years of “failing,” we finally had success with IVF. The unexpected side effect? Yup, you guessed it, twins!

I had always wanted to be a mom, but the thought of having two babies instead of one, despite my years of dreaming, was so far-fetched. Even in my youngest memories, I would play house and have a ton of kids, but never twins! I never even thought of it. My family didn't have any twins, and I only knew one set from high school. But it's what happened.

Just like with my infertility, I studied everything there was to know about twins while still keeping my head in the clouds as much as possible. I have to be honest here, the air was thin in those clouds because the idea of twins, followed by a not-so-typical pregnancy, was knocking the wind out of me.

Alas, I found a twin mom support group that met monthly in NYC and decided to go. I was just 14 weeks pregnant and pooping in my pants. (Not literally, but you get the point.) There was a mom there that night who had been leading the group for years. Her twins were already in middle school and she seemed like a happy functional adult. Meanwhile, I was consumed with worry about not only becoming a mom, but also about what I thought life would be like with *two* kids.

The woman at the head of the room was so prim and proper, and to me, she seemed like the Dalai Lama of twin moms. “*Teach me, oh Wise One*” I thought in my head. “*Tell me the mysteries of twins and how I'm going to make it through.*” She spoke for a bit and then opened up the floor to questions. My hand shot up and I asked, “How am I going to breastfeed two?” with a crack in my voice.

She then told a magical tale of her breastfeeding experience, which sounded like something out of a French perfume commercial. It was glorious, satisfying, flawless, natural, and most of all *easy*. She told us how her twins latched immediately after their full-term birth and how she was able to exclusively tandem breastfeed her twins for months upon months with ease. I left that meeting on cloud 9. If she could do this... I could do this.

(Insert a very loud and abrasive record scratch sound here)

I was 34 weeks on the day. I'd been in and out of hospitals from my 27th week with dabs of preeclampsia popping up and rearing its ugly head. My body was shutting down. My kidneys were screaming for mercy and my heart was suffering along with the rest of my body. The twins had to be delivered, and quickly. *Induction! Vaginal delivery! Post-partum hemorrhage! Extensive recovery room stay! NICU Stay! Pumps! Doctors! Specialists! PPD!* You name it, it happened in this very fast forward portion of my life.

Very distant were those visions I had of what motherhood would be like. Especially not the glorious, satisfying, flawless, natural motherhood that I felt was almost promised at that twin club meeting. Instead, it was mechanical, clinical, inadequate, and substandard at best. BUT! It was my reality. In the classic "make lemons into lemonade" fashion, I pulled myself up by the bootstraps (what the heck is a bootstrap anyway) and did was expected of me. I pumped. I kangaroo cared. I put on a brave face and I made it. I sucked it all up. All the "wants" and dreams I had, I gave it all up. I gave it up for reality.

(Fast forward again. Now, move forward a few years.)

The twins start their first day of kindergarten. I made it. I'll spare you the details of the more than 20 hours a week of therapy they needed between them to get to this point. I'll spare you the story of how I never returned to a "normal" job because I felt like their full-time intern moving them from place to place. But the day they started kindergarten, my liberation and rebirth began.

I was determined to spare mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and every other family member of twins the same fate that I had. I was determined to properly prepare families of the realities of twins—all versions. The good, the bad, and the ugly. I'd never paint ONE picture of a glorious, satisfying, flawless, natural motherhood life. Instead, I'd tell them about that version of motherhood, and many others that exist in the world. Thus, Twiniversity was born. With \$137 in change, I started a website and started to write.

(Fast forward one more time. Add 10 years to the pot now.)

My twins are in high school. Twiniversity reaches over 2

million (yup, million) folks a month globally and I live to tell this tale. I've since become a Child Passenger Safety Technician (CPST) Counselor and a Certified Lactation Counselor. I'm a bestselling author of "What To Do When You're Having Two" and I've taught thousands of families through my Twiniversity classes in NYC, Chicago, Houston, and online. My life's work has been to paint a *real*, honest picture for families and to not let them have delusions of grandeur, but rather equip them with tips and tricks to face the cold hard facts of parenthood.

So much has happened in my life. I'd like to think that someone above has been steering my ship into this port, and now, I'm docked and I get to share. Thanks for reading my story and please realize that MANY of the twin moms you meet will have experienced lives like mine. Not all glamor. Not all glory. But now, I've created a community through Twiniversity where they get to tell their tales, connect with other parents, and learn about the many different ways there are to be a parent.

I hope you allow me to continue this conversation daily over at Twiniversity.com and I hope that you choose to tell all your friends, family, patients, UPS drivers, dog walkers, and anyone else you know about Twiniversity and how we can help make the lives of twin families around the globe better.

Natalie Diaz is the founder and CEO of Twiniversity, a resource and support network for parents of twins. She also wrote the best selling book "What To Do When You're Having Two." Twiniversity is also launching a Getting Ready for Twins Class shortly to support mothers and families expecting twins.



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The BFREE Team is now on Facebook! @ [facebook.com/bfreecoalition](https://www.facebook.com/bfreecoalition)

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