

Script – Broadcast – The Trials and Tribulations of Breastfeeding

August is Breastfeeding Awareness Month

Breastfeeding can help get your baby off to a healthy start in the first year of life. But sometimes it doesn't come easy – for mom or baby. August is National Breastfeeding Awareness Month, and recently Shawn Johnson East used this time to talk about her own breastfeeding issues. The former Olympic gold medal gymnast took to social media to share her struggles with nursing Jett, her four-week-old son.

On her Instagram story East wrote, "There's always one feed a day where he seems super hungry and gives all the cues but screams bloody murder when I try to feed him. It makes me so sad."

She's not alone.

What East is experiencing is quite common among many new moms, says Dr. Christina Kramer, an OB/GYN with OSF HealthCare. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), exclusively breastfeeding during the first six months provides all the nutrition a baby needs. At six months, babies can benefit from continued breastfeeding, while slowly incorporating other solid foods until at least 12 months of age, or as long as mother and baby want to breastfeed. But Dr. Kramer says those timelines are negotiable.

"The main thing I talk about with women is you need a healthy mom to have a healthy baby and some women either struggle with breastfeeding, find that their milk supply is insufficient, maybe have some medical conditions or have had surgeries that make lactation difficult, and some women may be having post-partum depression and breastfeeding difficulties can exacerbate that," says Dr. Kramer. "So if women need permission to give the baby a bottle we're more than happy to do that. It may not be for everyone and even though there are health benefits, the last thing a post-partum mom needs is guilt on top of everything else she's going through."

Dr. Kramer says there are plenty of benefits to breastfeeding for both mom and baby. For mom, breastfeeding can help accelerate post-partum weight loss as well as decrease the risk of breast and ovarian cancer. Breastfeeding provides the baby with important nutrition, antibodies to ward off viruses and infections, and helps lower the risk of issues such as Type 2 diabetes, asthma and ear infections.

It's important, adds Dr. Kramer, to let your baby lead each feeding. And to remember that every baby is different. Some will eat quickly and some will take longer to get the nutrition he needs. Others will take frequent breaks during each feeding.

Among the signs your baby may be hungry are:

- Turning the head side to side
- Licking the lips
- Smacking the lips
- Putting their hands to their mouth
- Crying

"There are a lot of signs babies are starting to get hungry and I think the biggest thing for women is to know their own baby and not necessarily based on a textbook or what other people say," says Dr. Kramer. "Crying is actually a late sign of hunger so you want to try to intervene and feed your baby

before the baby starts crying because sometimes if they've started screaming you've reached a point where they're too upset and they might not feed well."

If your best attempts at breastfeeding are not going according to plan, Dr. Kramer recommends seeking help sooner rather than later.

"I think the important thing is if a woman feels like she's struggling to breastfeed and it's extremely painful, if it seems like the baby is taking a really long time to nurse, the latch isn't good, those may be signs there is an issue with the breastfeeding or the latch," she says, "and we would encourage women to seek help from an experienced labor and delivery nurse, a certified lactation consultant, some obstetric providers feel comfortable tackling some of those lactation issues, but the take home message is you're definitely not alone and we want you to reach out for help."

As a mother of five, Dr. Kramer knows firsthand the ups and downs of breastfeeding.

"For other medical conditions or issues due to baby supplementing with formula might be needed," she says. "And that's ok too. I have kiddos that I bottle fed and kiddos that I breast fed and they don't love you any different."