

Blog Post: The Power of Breastfeeding: A Personal Journey and Professional Insights

As part of National Breastfeeding Awareness Week, Noreen Turley, one of the hosts' of the HSE Talking Health and Wellbeing Podcast, highlights the recent episode focused on Breastfeeding:

I want to share with you an enlightening conversation we had on our recent HSE Talking Health and Wellbeing Podcast about Breastfeeding. We had the pleasure of hosting Helen, a mother currently breastfeeding her daughter Ella, Alison, a Public Health Nurse and lactation consultant, and Laura, the National Breastfeeding Co-ordinator.

Helen's Unique Journey to Motherhood

Helen's journey to motherhood was unique. She was diagnosed with breast cancer before having children. However, her supportive oncologist encouraged her to conceive, and she was fortunate to become pregnant. Breastfeeding became a way for Helen to reclaim something that had been taken away from her and to develop a newfound respect for her body.

The Importance of Preparation and Support

Helen proactively sought support before Ella was born, attending breastfeeding classes both online and in-person. She acknowledges that while no class or book can fully prepare you for motherhood, having knowledge and information can be empowering.

During the initial days of breastfeeding, Helen faced challenges due to her unique circumstances and the lack of face-to-face support during the pandemic. However, she received support from the lactation team at the hospital and reached out to Alison, the public health nurse and lactation consultant, for further assistance.

The Role of Lactation Consultants and Breastfeeding Support Groups

Alison, a Lactation Consultant and Public Health Nurse, explains that they offer antenatal consultations to address any concerns or questions mothers may have before giving birth. She emphasises the importance of listening to mothers, empowering them, and offering encouragement.

Alison also facilitates support groups, where mothers can meet other mothers and have conversations about the challenges they face. These groups are not just about breastfeeding; they also provide a space for mothers to discuss various topics and share their stories.

The Power of Shared Experiences

Helen, who attended one of Alison's groups, shares her experience of finding support and friendship among the other mothers. She mentions that being with a group of mothers going through similar experiences is invaluable, as friends and family may forget the challenges of early motherhood.

The Stigma of Breastfeeding in Public

Helen shares her experience of breastfeeding in public and acknowledges the contradiction in society in terms of body confidence and how some women experience fear and stigma surrounding breastfeeding in public.

The Place for Formula Milk

The conversation then shifts to the topic of supplementing with formula. Helen shares her experience of feeling like she had failed when she had to supplement with formula for a few weeks. Alison reassures her that there is a place for formula in certain situations and that every drop of breast milk counts.

Returning to Work While Breastfeeding

Helen talks about her experience of returning to work when her daughter was 12 months old and how her workplace was supportive in providing a room for her to pump. Alison explains that there are laws in place to protect mothers who choose to continue breastfeeding while working.

The Importance of Wraparound Support

Alison discusses the importance of wraparound support for breastfeeding mothers. She mentions that many mothers, including fathers and partners, are opting to participate in this support. By receiving wraparound support, tiredness and overwhelm can be alleviated, allowing mothers to continue breastfeeding for as long as they choose.

Promoting Breastfeeding in Ireland

Laura, the HSE's national breastfeeding coordinator, discusses the efforts being made to promote breastfeeding in the country. She mentions the benefits of breastfeeding and the importance of consistent messaging and evidence-based practice.

The Growth of Lactation Roles

Laura explains that there has been a significant increase in lactation roles in the HSE, with 55 people now working in these positions compared to 20 five years ago. This ensures that every maternity hospital has at least one lactation consultant, and public health nursing services have at least a half-time post in each of the 32 areas.

Helen's Advice for Expectant Mothers

Helen emphasises the importance of seeking support during pregnancy and after the baby is born. She encourages mothers to not hesitate in seeking help and highlights the high quality of support available in the community and workplaces.

Helen advises not to give up on hard days and shares her positive experience with a breastfeeding counsellor who provided out-of-hours support. She believes that anyone who wants to breastfeed should be supported, not just through formal supports but also societally.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this episode highlights the importance of seeking support, normalising breastfeeding, and celebrating personal milestones. I want to thank our guests for joining the podcast and sharing their insights. There is much more to discuss about breastfeeding,

and I encourage you all to share this blog post with others. To listen to the full podcast go to [HSE Talking Health and Wellbeing Podcast: Breastfeeding Support](#) and to find out more go to www.mychild.ie .