



# I formula-fed. SO WHAT?

You can keep your soggy breast pads, says Kathryn Blundell. Giving your baby formula milk is nothing to be ashamed of



It's right up there with a drug-free birth as the rite of passage that proves you're all woman and a good mother. Breastfeeding: the most

natural thing in the world. But what if, like me, you don't really fancy it?

For some formula feeders, 'not really fancying it' translates into 'concealing the fact I'm using a bottle'. So visits from health visitors are pre-empted by the scrabble to hide the steriliser under the sink. 'What, oh that bottle. I've been expressing so Dave can give feeds.' Hmm.

But why the shame? Sure, breastmilk has the edge over infant formula – it's free, it doesn't need heating up and you can whip up a feed in the middle of the night without having to get out of bed. Then there are all the studies that show it

reduces the risk of breast cancer for you, and stomach upsets and allergies for your baby. But even the convenience and supposed health benefits of breastmilk couldn't induce me to stick my nipple in a bawling baby's mouth.

## HANDS OFF

After nine months of denial, lardiness and bad shoes, as soon as the birth was out of the way I wanted my body back. (And some wine). Not that I had anything particularly useful to do with my body, except – paradoxically – care for my baby. I also wanted to give my boobs at least a chance to stay on my chest rather than dangling around my stomach, which, after two pregnancies, still has 'tonal' issues of its own.

They're part of my sexuality, too – not just breasts, but fun bags. And when you have that attitude (and I admit I made no

attempt to change it), seeing your teeny tiny, innocent baby latching on where only a lover has been before feels, well, a little creepy.

## FORMULA WON

I don't think I'm the only one, either – only 52% of mums still breastfeed after six weeks. Ask most of the quitters why they stopped and you'll hear tales of agonising three-hour feeding sessions and – the drama! – bloody nipples. But I often wonder whether many of these women, like me, just couldn't be fagged or felt like getting tipsy once in a while. My reasons for not breastfeeding might not be in the league of 'my boobs are falling off', but they make sense to me and I hope some women can be reassured by my honesty.

I wasn't always so confident about being an out-and-proud formula fan. I recall one sunny afternoon when, happily feeding my baby in a park, ducks quacking in the distance, a passing stranger – also a mum – asked me whether I was breastfeeding. Reeling from the impertinence of such a personal question (and anyway, wasn't the bottle in my hand a give away?) I hesitated to answer. Say 'yes' and I'd be a liar. Say 'no' and, from the pursing of her lips and arch of her brow, it was clear I'd be marked as a weak, selfish mum, straight from the Vicky Pollard school of parenting. The clock was ticking. Liar? Bad mum? I plumped for bad mum.

'You do know your baby will get sick if you give him that poison,' she said, flouncing off. Thanks, sister. Great advice.

## THE WHITE STUFF

So, time for a reality check. Formula milk is not toxic, lacking in nutrients or in any way bad for a baby's health when prepared properly – and we can all read the back of a packet for instructions. No, it's not A-grade, but neither is it powdered scum that will turn my baby into an anaemic ball of flab with a life expectancy of three. Nor is the fact my baby suckles on silicone rather than skin going to give him a mental illness or mean we don't bond. That's just ridiculous.

The Milk Mafia can keep their guilt trips. Bullying other mums about something as special and nurturing as feeding their babies (and yes, bottle feeding can be lovely and intimate) is a depth even Vicky Pollard wouldn't sink to. So let's hear it, ladies, for modern nutritional science, but most of all for our freedom of choice. n