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Giving Thanks: Jenna Elfman Donates Breastmilk to Save Sick Baby, Beats Breastfeeding Booby Traps™

By Bettina. Posted on November 24, 2010

Actress **Jenna Elfman** shares her challenging breastfeeding experience, how she overcame obstacles, and how her pumped breastmilk helped save the life of a baby that was born drug-addicted. Jenna Elfman won a Golden Globe for her role in the hit TV series **Dharma & Greg**, starred in the movie **Keeping the Faith** and just wrapped filming **Friends with Benefits**, set to hit movie theaters July 2011. Jenna is married to **Bodhi Elfman**. They have two children, Story and Easton. We're naming Jenna a [Best for Babes Champion for Moms](#) and she also works closely with the non-profit [Healthy Child Healthy World](#). Don't forget to read our breastfeeding resources at the end of the interview!



BfB:



Actress Jenna Elfman with her second son, Easton. Skin-to-skin is good for mom, baby, & breastfeeding!

Jenna, thank you so much for talking to us about your breastfeeding experience!

Jenna: I love what you guys are doing, I think it's awesome! If I had only known when I had my first . . . I definitely experienced a lot of challenges. As a result, I'm on a mission with every pregnant woman I see! I'll ask, "So are you planning to breastfeed? Have you prepared?" [If anyone had told me](#) what to

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Bestforbabes.org is the best thing to happen to breastfeeding since the invention of the breastpump! I LOVE the guilt/pressure free way you present everything. -
-Laura Rimbey, Oregon

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expect[1], or had given me some pointers, I would have been able to have a very different experience.

BfB: Is it fair to say you were “Booby Trapped” by the barriers to breastfeeding?

Jenna: Yes! I had zero education about breastfeeding before giving birth to my first son, I didn't know there was anything TO learn about breastfeeding! I thought you put the baby on the breast and they sucked and that was it. There was maybe one sentence on it in my birth class. So . . . when I finally put him on the breast; I didn't know about latch, I didn't know about anything! I was not prepared, and didn't know that you're very tired, that you have to feed your baby often so you're awake a lot, that you're focusing all your attention on this brand new prize, and that your hormones go through a whole shift. You potentially have no education about how to breastfeed, yet you still have the duty of feeding your child, and keeping the child alive. My milk came in the day I came home from the hospital, and I still didn't know how to latch. My baby wasn't getting enough milk, and the hospital told me that I needed to feed him every 3 to 4 hours, but that's based on what a formula-fed baby needs[2]! Story was hungry and losing more weight than he should, so I had to switch to formula for a couple of days. The nurses kept telling me to latch the baby “up and over”, and I couldn't understand what they meant. I ended up having him latched with his bottom jaw on the nipple . . . later I found out the bottom jaw is the “working jaw” and my latch was all wrong. My nipples were really injured from not having a proper latch[3], it hurt really bad. I had a kid that was losing weight, and it was WAY stressful, and I was so engorged, making it even harder to latch him on.

BfB: Because you were creating more demand by putting your baby on all the time, but because of his bad latch, he wasn't getting it.

Jenna: Exactly. It was definitely not boring. So I ended up just pumping so I could heal, and he was drinking pumped milk out of bottles. By the time I healed enough to put him back on, he was like “I'm over this” and stayed on bottles[4]. So he got exclusively breast milk out of bottles, and I ended up pumping for ten and a half months.

BfB: Wow, so you were an “EPer”! That's short for “exclusively pumping” –there is a whole [support group](#) for women who end up exclusively pumping[5], and most of them were booby-trapped like you were.

Jenna: I pumped in the backs of cars, on the way to the set, on the freeway, shopping and then going to back to the car. I was walking around New York City, and I went to FAO Schwarz and said “Hey, I know you're closing, but I need to feed my baby, can I pump in the bathroom? Of course they said yes, when you say “I need to feed my child” sometimes that opens doors.



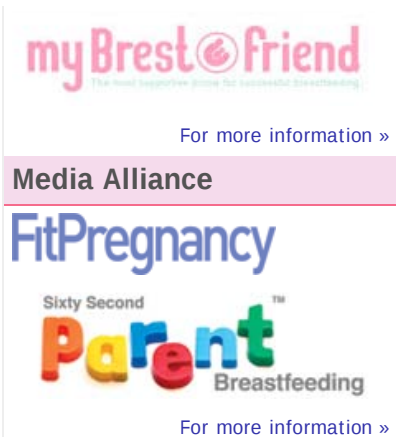
But here's an amazing thing that came out of all that pumping. Of course you know, as your baby feeds, your body calibrates because it's supply and demand. Because I was pumping, and always pumping to drain the breast, I was making ridiculous amounts of milk. I was freezing, freezing, freezing, freezing, freezing tons of milk more than he was using. I had no more room in my freezer, every time I opened the door, it was falling out. I had a friend, who had a family member who gave birth to a methamphetamine-addicted baby. They didn't know the sister was on these drugs, and the baby was born detoxing from methamphetamine, which is one of the most horrific ways to start this lifetime, detoxing from drugs you had nothing to do with. This poor baby couldn't keep anything down, no formula was working. My friend was over at my house and we were in the kitchen, and my husband opens the freezer and says, “Hey . . . what about THAT?” And I said, “Oh my God, you can have it all,” because I wasn't

using it. So my friend and his wife took the baby in because the mother took off, it was a bad situation, and once a week my friend would come over and get a supply of breastmilk[6]. The second the baby started on breastmilk, he could hold it down, he could take it, all of his rash symptoms on his body started going away. I literally kept him alive for several months on my breastmilk. He was thriving, he was gaining weight, and going through the withdrawal symptoms much better . . . my friends ended up officially adopting him, and I saw him at a birthday party the other day, he is now 3 and doing great.

BfB: How amazing is that! It's like donating an organ.

Jenna: It was so rewarding. To this day when I see him, in my heart I feel connected to him, like he's my little angel friend.

I had so wanted to breastfeed, and it was such a loss for me that I didn't pull it off. I wanted to be one of those mothers who are hanging out, talking with their girlfriends, lifting up their shirt, feeding their kid . . . I wanted to be that person, who could just whip out their boob and feed their kid! That just did not



happen. I probably could have gotten Story back on the breast, if I had had baby-led breastfeeding information, which I did not have until this time around.

BfB: You said you saw lactation consultants, and none of them could help you get the baby back on the breast?

Jenna: I was out of town filming, so I didn't have a lactation consultant nearby, and truthfully I didn't even know to ask a lactation consultant about getting Story back on the breast, I just assumed it wasn't going to work out. I was bummed because all my peers were breastfeeding and I was excusing myself to go pump. So I was determined with my second, with Easton, to do it differently.

BfB: What did you do differently with breastfeeding your second child, Easton, now 8 months?

Jenna Elfman's Top 3 Breastfeeding Preparation Tips: 1. Take a GOOD breastfeeding class 2. Read Breastfeeding Made Simple 3. Watch "The Breast Crawl"

Jenna: With Easton, I got educated. The one book that saved my life was "Breastfeeding Made Simple" — the most phenomenal breastfeeding book ever. I had major epiphanies of what had gone wrong with Story and how all of it could have been prevented and I could have successfully breastfed him for as long as I wanted. With Easton, from the first moment I put him on the breast I made sure he had a good latch! I was not going to let his first orientation to my breast be with an incorrect latch and become a bad habit. So every time I made sure that he latched properly. Another amazing thing for the sore nipples, which a nurse in the hospital told me, is to excrete a little breastmilk and spread it around on the nipple, and then put the nipple cream on after each feeding. I did that every time, and I had sore nipples for maybe three days. Between getting the proper latch every time (and never compromising on it), and taking proper care with the cream, it was fantastic. I was so glad I finally got to breastfeed!



We thought this was a beautiful story-perfect to celebrate Thanksgiving-and kudos to Jenna for Beating the Breastfeeding Booby Traps™! Did you experience Booby Traps like hers?

Stay tuned for Part II of our Interview with Actress Jenna Elfman, coming soon!

[1] For information on how to prepare for breastfeeding, see Jenna's Top 3 Breastfeeding Tips box and our **Help for Expecting Moms** section.

[2] *Best for Babes* believes that mothers should not be discharged from the hospital until they have mastered the ability to establish a successful latch with confidence and without assistance. As for scheduling, breastfed babies and their mothers do best when feeding "on cue" not by the clock. When baby shows early signs of hunger (crying is a late indication) they will latch best, milk supply will normalize, and moms & babies do better! For more information, see [Get Your Best Game On, Girlfriend](#)

[3] Excellent information on preventing nipple pain, getting a good latch, and treating problems: <http://www.drjacknewman.com> "Dr. Jack Newman's website has a wealth of information, including detailed information on [nipple management](#). See . Also see [Motherlove.com](#) .

[4] With the proper help, it is often, though not always, possible to transition babies back to the breast. An excellent International Board Certified Lactation Consultant or recommended lactation specialist can help you, to find one in your zip code area, see <http://www.ilca.org>, or ask a [La Leche League Leader](#), Childbirth Educator, or doula for a recommendation.

[5] For more information on pumping and expressing breastmilk, see <http://www.kellymom.com/bf/pumping/index.html> "Kellymom.com's extensive pumping guide and Ameda.com's excellent pumping tips, <http://www.ameda.com/breast-pumping/breast-pumping-tips>. Support groups for exclusively pumping moms include <http://www.exclusivelypumping.com> and Facebook group: [Exclusively Pumping & Expressing](#). Let us know if you have others!

[6] Human milk is the next best substitute to breastfeeding or the mother's own milk, and is far superior to infant formula. Donated breast milk is as safe as donated human blood when screened and pasteurized through a Human Milk Banking Association of North America milk bank. Anyone who is considering informal human milk sharing through friends, family members, or groups like <http://www.milkshare.com> and <http://www.eatsonfeets.com> is encouraged make an informed decision and educate themselves about potential risks. See this recent [Time.com](#) article for more on Eats on Feets.

Posted in [Booby Traps, Breastfeeding & Working, Breastfeeding Under Extreme Circumstances, Celebrities, Hospitals & Breastfeeding](#)

Comments (23)

23 Responses to “Giving Thanks: Jenna Elfman Donates Breastmilk to Save Sick Baby, Beats Breastfeeding Booby Traps™”



Sara says:
November 24, 2010 at 11:05 am

Jenna is such an amazing and inspiring woman! Thank you for sharing this awesome interview!

[Reply](#)



Holly says:
November 24, 2010 at 11:14 am

I love that she donated milk!! 😊 Donation (or using donated milk) is such a controversy right now.. but when the *stars* start doing things they seem to be *ok* for us normal folks to do LOL. Anyone know how long she is planning to nurse this child? So called *extended* (by US standards) would be awesome and help open yet another door! 😊 I am a little hmm how to put it... frustrated... that she is a “Best for Babes Champion for Moms” when SO many moms do this exact thing and get little to no recognition. But because she is *a star* doing it she gets recognized and gets a title. I would love to see more *everyday* moms interviewed and recognized 😊

[Reply](#)



Bettina says:
November 24, 2010 at 11:28 am

Holly, there are lots and lot of interviews with every day moms all over the web . . . but they do not get as much visibility, no matter how hard we try. By interviewing celebrities, we are taking advantage of their star power to reach *millions* of moms, educating, inspiring and empowering the masses with valuable information. We are also enrolling them to help us shine a spotlight on the barriers . . . hopefully one day we will have a breastfeeding celebrity testify in front of Congress about the urgency for paid maternity leave! Breastfeeding needs a Bono that champions this cause.

[Reply](#)



Mandy says:
November 24, 2010 at 2:34 pm

I second the Breastfeeding Bono. (Okay. That sounded weird. But you know what I mean.) At some point, our government MUST understand that our current maternity “leaves” are barbaric. I'll support any celebrity who takes up the role of advocate to help our country's women receive the same leave options that every other industrialized nation in the world allows. This ridiculous practice of mothers returning to work before their bodies are even completely healed and potentially halting a breastfeeding relationship needs to stop. For a country that touts “family values” at every turn, we sure don't put much value into our families.

Sorry. I'm getting on my soap box here. And totally off topic.

[Reply](#)



Bettina says:
November 24, 2010 at 3:47 pm

It's not off topic. We agree. And while they're at it, they need to stand up and say that the majority of our hospitals/maternity centers scoring a “D” on breastfeeding support is UNACCEPTABLE.

[Reply](#)



Rachel says:
November 24, 2010 at 11:18 am

I just wanted to say thank you to Jenna! You are amazing and awesome! I can only hope that more people in the “spotlight” can normalize breast feeding again! *Swoons* You're my heeeeeeeero!

Reply



Jeannine says:
November 24, 2010 at 11:23 am

Way to go Jenna!

Reply



Jen says:
November 24, 2010 at 11:54 am

I breastfed all of my sons, now 14, 11, and 6 and I LOVED it. It was my favorite part of their infancy. It was our special time together, our bonding time. I too was uninformed and uneducated when I had my first son so when my mother passed away three months after my son was born it didn't occur to me that if I didn't pump while I was away, my breasts would stop producing milk. I, same as Jenna, didn't realize with my first son how educated you really should be and how much easier being educated helps the process. I thought at first, put the breast in his mouth and we're done. I never knew there were issues, pain, and infections, and how much you use is how much you'll produce. So needless to say, when I returned to NY from Florida after my sister and I were done taking care of what we needed to finalize after my mother passed away, I was INCREDIBLY disappointed to learn that I could no longer breast feed and I didn't have anyone there telling me or teaching me if it were possible to begin feeding him again and have my breasts increase their milk production, because after a week of not pumping, my breasts hardly made any milk. I was SO disappointed... needless to say I did not make those same mistakes with my other two sons and was able to breastfeed them for as long as I wanted to.

Reply



Celina Dykstra says:
November 24, 2010 at 11:55 am

Great interview, expresses so well what moms I know say about what they wish they had known the first time around... would like to also suggest these two links: <http://www.biologicalnurturing.com/> and <http://www.nancymohrbacher.com/>

Love the work you are doing!

Reply



sarah says:
November 24, 2010 at 12:10 pm

Thank you for publishing this! Formula companies have done such a thoroughly excellent job of advertising canned formula that a lot of people do not understand that the only normal and healthy way to feed a baby is with human breast milk! I loved reading this informative interview.

Thank you.

Reply



Courtney says:
November 24, 2010 at 12:32 pm

I have always been a HUGE fan of Jenna's, so to see this just solidifies my views of her! I had similar struggles with my first, even had the doctor pushing formula (I finally wised up about this lousy doctor about 6 months after my daughter was born - he was lousy the entire pregnancy and downright rude, but I was too naive to know any better and ended up with a 100% unnecessary c-section because of him as well).

I got educated and nursed my 2nd baby 15 months (dried up during a subsequent pregnancy that ended in miscarriage) and he got pumped milk until 18 months. I nursed my 3rd baby 17 months, total baby-led weaning and he never would take a bottle. Now with my 3rd I again am shooting for 2 years of nursing.

With my 2nd, I had to pump to maintain my supply (he had hypotonia and while he GOT milk, his nursing didn't stimulate my supply) and ended up with expired milk I had to toss. With my 3rd I had already pumped a decent stash when we realized he wasn't going to take a bottle, and again it ended up getting tossed when it expired. Now with my 4th I am aware of organizations such as milkshare and eatsonfeet and have signed up to pump extra for both! I know from experience that my body can make a LOT of milk if I ask it to... I would get 16+ oz during one of my pumping sessions with my 2nd!

Having celebrities speak out about these things gets the word out faster about organizations such as these, and if I had known, I could have donated hundreds or even THOUSANDS of ounces of milk with my 2nd and 3rd babies. SO glad I know about it now.

Reply



TheFeministBreeder says:
November 24, 2010 at 1:20 pm

Thank you Jenna – what an AWESOME story! I love you even more now.

[Reply](#)



Heather says:
November 24, 2010 at 1:30 pm

Yet another reason to love Jenna Elfman! I always have and this just makes me love her even more!
Awesome article 😊

[Reply](#)



Elise Higgins says:
November 24, 2010 at 1:34 pm

I've loved Jenna ever since Dharma and Greg and now I love her even more. It made me so happy to read this story. I am very proud of breast feeding my 5 kiddos (one still nursing) and I am so proud of Jenna! Way to go hot mama!

[Reply](#)



Mandy says:
November 24, 2010 at 2:25 pm

I'm sitting here in tears. I never thought I'd hear another mother with a breastfeeding story so similar to mine. I, too, thought, I have a boob, he has a mouth, bada bing breastfeeding! Visions of me in a flowy dress nursing my son while birds sang and dandelions floated in the air were replaced by alarm clocks and the sound of the pump. I EP'd for ten months. I pumped in a car, at the drive in, in the Nordstrom's mother's lounge, at the beach, at every friend's house, pretty much anywhere I went, I had my pump at my side.

With my daughter, I educated myself and learned everything I could about breastfeeding. When she was placed in my arms, she latched on like a champ and is still going strong 16 months later.

Thank you for this interview. It makes me admire Jenna that much more.

[Reply](#)



Rachel says:
November 24, 2010 at 2:33 pm

My new favorite celebrity! I love that she is so honest, open and nonjudgemental. I can't believe she helped save another baby too!

[Reply](#)



Missy says:
November 24, 2010 at 2:36 pm

This is great! Since America is unfortunately so obsessed with celebs, I wish more would speak out about breastfeeding. It's really sad how humans are so ignorant when it comes to such a basic human need....feeding our young. Our society is so sad when it comes to this. People think feeding babies crap in a can is the way to go and just as good as breastmilk, doesn't help either when doctors/nurses are so uninformed about the topic too. :/ Good job Jenna!

[Reply](#)



Bettina says:
November 24, 2010 at 3:46 pm

A lot of moms would much rather breastfeed but have been boobytrapped. Many moms have been misled by formula advertising and by ill-educated healthcare professionals that formula is "just as good" as breastmilk. For some moms, using formula is unavoidable because they have had mastectomies, experienced sexual abuse (although breastfeeding can be healing and empowering in those situations too) or are taking medications that are not compatible with breastfeeding, and donor milk is not accessible or affordable. I worry that calling infant formula "crap in a can" is only going to put those who have been boobytrapped but don't know it on the defensive. What would be great is if doctors etc. called it artificial baby milk, which is the preferred scientific name.

[Reply](#)

redwing says:



November 24, 2010 at 2:43 pm

La Leche League helps with so much – not just signposting to an IBCLC! Mothers can go to meetings while pregnant, meet other mothers, see babies feeding, find out top information, browse books and leaflets.... The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding is another fab book, check out <http://www.llli.org>!

Reply



Barefoot Liz says:
November 24, 2010 at 2:58 pm

Now I think Jenna is even more fabulous! I love positive breastfeeding stories.

Reply



Jenn Moch says:
November 24, 2010 at 3:02 pm

Such an amazing story. I had a similar situation after the birth of my 2nd child. My very best friend and I were pregnant at the same time and delivered within 3 weeks of one another. At 4 months of age her son became ill with RSV. He was on a nebulizor, as well as everything possible to keep his little lungs open to breath. Although my friend had done her best to breastfeed, she was unable for many of the same reasons mentioned in this article. It was her 1st child and she struggled to get him to latch on properly, and just couldn't seem to get him to. Often, I would go over and help her out, give her a break so she could get some rest. Obviously her infant being as sick as he was, was unable to sleep himself, which inturn made it nearly impossible for her to sleep. Needless to say she extremely worried about the RSV and the fact that her child didn't seem to be getting any better. During that visit she mentioned how the formula he was on was causing more phlem, which made him cough more causing his bronchial tubes to become sore and inflamed. I had breastfed my 1st child (luckily) with no problem, and was now breastfeeding my second. I offered to pump milk for her so son, in hopes that it would remove the issue with the cough and phlem as well as boost his immune system. She agreed, and I began pumping and freezing for her as often as I could. Although many in our families thought it was "weird" to feed your child someone else's breast milk, they could not deny the outcome. Almost immediately there was a difference in her child's breathing and overall health. We are both convinced it would have taken him much longer to recover from the virus had he not had breast milk. Hopefully with this article, the stigma of donating breast milk fades away, and the benefits to the children of women who are, for whatever reason, unable to breastfeed, surpass any and all stigmas attached to the idea of shared and donated breastmilk. Afterall.... it's the child's health and well being that is most important. Not what others may think about breast milk donated from a willing and able mom. I think it's awesome that Jenna speaks out about it. WAY TO GO!!

Reply



Kathy says:
November 24, 2010 at 5:00 pm

Thank you for sharing this story. I get so frustrated by the people who say that breastfeeding is easy. Hopefully hearing from somebody so well known that it can be a struggle and that there are ways to make it easier, will help other struggling mamas get the assistance they need instead of feeling they have to turn to formula. EP for 10 months, wow!

Reply



Kellyn says:
November 24, 2010 at 5:19 pm

on babycenter.com there is a community group/club (Whatever you wanna call it) for exclusive pumpers thats a support group and question/answer group for problem solving, celebrating, and venting. I EP by choice and find that group really helpful! We're called the Exclusive Pumpers.

Reply

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Website

Comments

