

Feeling like a **BOOB**

Breastfeeding in public is a mother's right, so why do so many of us still feel too embarrassed to do it?

When your baby needs a feed, she needs it now. She doesn't care if you're at the supermarket checkout or a funeral. You can try to pacify her with jiggling keys or a cuddle, but really you know the only thing that will bring peace and quiet is the breast.

While society's attitude to breastfeeding in public is becoming more accepting, many women still feel uncomfortable doing it and, sadly, they are sometimes given good reasons to feel that way.

The social networking site, Facebook, is currently under fire for removing photos of breastfeeding mothers they consider a violation of their terms regarding obscene, pornographic or sexually explicit material. Some outraged users have started an online petition called, 'Hey Facebook, breastfeeding is not obscene'.

Just late last year, a Queensland woman made the headlines when told by the manager of her local pool to breastfeed her baby in the toilet. She made a complaint to the anti-discrimination board and rightly so, as the Queensland's Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, Susan Booth, confirmed at the time it is illegal to discriminate against women breastfeeding in public places.

Rights not wrong

In general, breastfeeding in public is covered under sex discrimination legislation. The NSW government passed legislation in 2007 that specifically made it illegal to discriminate against women breastfeeding in public places, like on public transport and in restaurants. This legislation followed an earlier Australian Law Reform Commission report that argued anti-discrimination legislation was needed to specifically address issues associated with breastfeeding.

Under the Anti-Discrimination (Breastfeeding) Bill 2007, women who believe they've been discriminated against can complain to the Anti-Discrimination



Board, which will investigate the complaint and try to resolve the issue. If that fails, the complaint can be taken to the Administrative Decisions Tribunal.

Hiding away

But even with the law backing breastfeeding in public, it can be awkward for some mums. In fact, a recent survey of over 600 participants conducted by KissKiss HugHug, a company that sells breastfeeding covers, found women will go to great lengths to avoid feeding their baby outside the home. The survey found that more than half (54%) of women hate breastfeeding in public so much they plan their day around it. Another 40% of women admitted they would feed their baby formula to avoid breastfeeding in front of friends and strangers.

Jacqueline Scott, director of KissKiss HugHug, says many new mothers are shy and feel uncomfortable about breastfeeding new babies in front of others because they are still learning and unsure of what they're doing. But even when they become more confident with feeding, they are faced with new challenges. "As the baby gets older, she is usually easily distracted, which means a high risk of flashing," she says.

Jacqueline has found mums deal with the problem of public breastfeeding in three different ways. Firstly, they may hide away in a parent's room – if there is one available. Many also schedule their day around the baby's feeding times but this can make it difficult to get out of the house at all. Others may choose to use some sort of breastfeeding cover, like the one KissKiss HugHug produce, to help them feed discreetly.

Out and proud

While a breastfeeding cover is one way to freely nurse your baby in public, there are other measures you can take to proudly feed your bub al fresco. Barb Glare, independent lactation consultant and *M&B* expert, suggests that wearing a specific breastfeeding top can help. She adds that wearing layers, such as a singlet under a T-shirt, will often perform the same function.

Barb says you should feel confident breastfeeding in public. "Most people prefer a quiet, happily feeding baby to a crying baby. Most people are supportive of a breastfeeding mum – you are more likely to get a smile or a story about another woman's breastfeeding experience than a complaint, if anyone even notices what you are doing!" She also stresses that it's your right to breastfeed wherever and whenever you like. "It's a baby's right to eat. We eat in public – they need to as well," she says.

"MOST PEOPLE PREFER A QUIET, HAPPILY FEEDING BABY TO A CRYING BABY. YOU ARE MORE LIKELY TO GET A SMILE OR A STORY THAN A COMPLAINT, IF ANYONE EVEN NOTICES WHAT YOU ARE DOING!"

Another thing to look out for in cafés and restaurants is a 'Breastfeeding Welcome Here' sticker, produced by the Australian Breastfeeding Association. The accreditation criteria for breastfeeding-friendly venues which display the sticker are that they have

a welcoming attitude from staff and management, a smoke-free environment and enough room to manoeuvre a pram.

A list of breastfeeding-friendly venues in Australia can be found on the ABA website (www.breastfeeding.asn.au) but as the venues must register via the website it may not be complete. And remember, even if a café or restaurant doesn't have the sticker, they have no right to ask you to stop feeding your baby. **M&B**

Real life

"A POLICEMAN TOLD ME TO STOP BREASTFEEDING!"

KATHERINE THOMAS, 24, MUM TO AMELIA, 10 MONTHS, WAS SHOCKED WHEN THREATENED FOR FEEDING HER BABY

"I was at our local shopping centre when my month-old baby started to cry. I had no choice but to feed her. So I covered us both with a muslin wrap and began feeding her in the food court. A security guard came up and said there'd been complaints about me breastfeeding. He asked me to stop, but I just ignored him.

Five minutes later he returned with a policeman. They said other customers had been complaining and I had to cover up or be removed from the shopping mall. I explained that I was covered up, it was natural anyway and I wasn't going to stop. The policeman then threatened to fine me! I had to interrupt my baby's feed and go to the parents' room.

I've been back to this shopping centre and the same security guard told me to stop feeding – and said a 'No breastfeeding in the mall' sign was going up! The whole experience has put me off feeding my baby at this centre. Now when I arrive I go to the parent's room to feed her.

I went to the police station and explained what had happened. They agreed it's my right to feed my bub, but so far no action has been taken."

Note: You cannot be made to stop breastfeeding in public, or be fined for doing so. If you have faced discrimination, contact your state's anti-discrimination board who will investigate your complaint.