



# A FIRST BREATH SUCCESS STORY



By Beth Turner

**MILWAUKEE** - It's 8:30am. A Tuesday morning. Elisha is cradling a phone and her newborn son. She's trying to warm a bottle for him and talk to a caller at the same time. This, another illustration how often motherhood demands more hands than you have. He's her first son, first child, and first chance at motherhood. She wants to do it right. And that meant snuffing out, putting down, and not buying cigarettes. She says she wishes she would have known more about all the risks to her son developing inside her. Perhaps she would have tried to quit earlier than six months into the pregnancy.

But that was when Elisha got involved with St. Michael's Hospital in Milwaukee, its Midwife Center and the *First Breath* program it offered. Elisha says, Ali Phipps the *First Breath* coordinator encouraged her to quit and gave her numerous tools to help.

"When I started the program I was smoking a half a pack a day (about ten cigarettes). By the time my son was born I was down to just two a day."

What helped Elisha the most? She says the *First Breath* bookmark with the list of 100 things to do other than smoke.

Phipps says behavior modification techniques are beneficial, i.e. taking a shower, a brisk walk, prayer, meditation. Nicotine replacement therapy is also very helpful. Since mood, stress and situations change daily, Elisha could pick which tactic would work best for her that day to avoid lighting up. Some days she would pick up a book and read, others she would leave for a while since everyone else she was living with also smoked. Some days it worked best for her to just sit down and write out goals and aspirations she had for herself, and her growing son. Another *First Breath* tool.

Elisha says while she did not get any pressure to smoke from friends or family she also received no encouragement from them in her quitting effort. This is where she relied heavily on the *First Breath* program and the other moms going through it.

"It helped just to talk about pregnancy, and ask questions. I had friends who smoked and their babies were born with breathing problems. This made me cut back on my own smoking."

Elisha has plans for subsequent pregnancies.

"I will try not to smoke at all right from the beginning. And I will go back into the *First Breath* program."

Elisha knows all about the risks to a developing baby. The health risks to her if she chooses to keep smoking. She knows lung tissue starts healing.....turning a healthy pink again once the cigarettes are set aside. She knows that she wants no breathing or health problems with any baby yet to be. She also knows quitting isn't easy, but she has more tools now than ever before and a program she can count on.

Elisha is about to put the phone down and get her son ready for the day. He has a doctor's appointment and she has other errands and chores to finish up. All her hands are busy, not one of them holding a cigarette.