



# Breast Engorgement

During the first week after delivery, as the colostrum is changing to mature milk, your breasts will become full. Normal postpartum fullness usually diminishes within 3-5 days. Engorgement may develop if your baby does not adequately remove the milk from your breasts. During this time, your breasts will feel hard, hot and painful.

## Prevention

- Always check that you have a good latch
- Breastfeed your baby frequently, 8-12 times in 24 hours.
- Avoid supplements of water or formula unless medically indicated.
- If you miss any feedings, even one, express your milk with a pump or by hand.
- When weaning your baby, do it gradually.

## Treatment

- Apply a hot, moist towel to your breasts for 2-5 minutes, or take a hot shower before nursing your baby.
- If your breasts are too full for the baby to latch, use hand expression or a pump to express some milk to soften the areola. This makes it easier for the baby to attach to the breast.
- Use gentle breast massage before and during breastfeeding, focusing on hard spots and lumps.
- Feed your baby or pump your breasts until your breasts feel softer
- Apply icy cold compresses (try cold washcloths, cold or frozen whole leaves of green cabbage or ice packs) to the breast after nursing to relieve the discomfort and to decrease swelling.
- If your nipples are flat, wear multiple holed breast shells (such as the Medela Softshells) for 30 minutes before breastfeeding. These will help draw out your nipple, making it easier for the baby to latch on. Discontinue use if discomfort occurs.
- Avoid bottles, pacifiers and nipple shields during this engorgement period. These may cause nipple confusion/preference.

## Plugged Ducts and Mastitis

If engorgement continues beyond the first 3-5 days, or is triggered by longer stretches between your baby's feeds, be cautious of plugged ducts. Plugged ducts occur when milk gets "stuck" in one or more parts of your breast. Symptoms include localized pain in the breast, accompanied by a lump or red patch. You may also have a headache and feel generally unwell. The best treatment for a plugged duct is following a rigorous regime of the treatment protocol for engorgement (as above), ensuring that the affected breast is treated with heat, drained, and treated with cold compresses AT LEAST every three to four hours. You should also drink 3-4L of water a day and rest as much as possible.

If you have symptoms of a plugged duct AND a temperature over 38 degrees, treat your symptoms aggressively as above and call your midwife right away. You may need antibiotics for an infection called mastitis.