

Mastitis: Infection of the Breast

Mastitis is an infection of the breast that causes pain, redness, warmth and swelling. Mastitis can also cause fever, chills and flu-like symptoms. While most cases of mastitis occur during the first 6 weeks after delivery, mastitis can occur at any time.

What are some of the risk factors for developing mastitis?

- Infrequent feedings, missed feedings or sudden weaning
- Unrelieved engorgement or an oversupply of milk
- Poor latch at the breast or an ineffective suck
- Pressure on the breast that restricts milk flow (tight bra, restrictive clothing, sleeping on your stomach or straps from a backpack or diaper bag)
- Plugged duct or blocked nipple pore
- Cracked or damaged nipples

Can I breastfeed while I have mastitis?

It is safe to breastfeed your baby while you are recovering from mastitis. It is also important to remove milk from the breast because allowing your breast to become engorged will slow recovery time.

- Breastfeed your baby frequently to keep the breast empty. If your baby is not able to latch at the breast, it is important for you to use a breast pump for 15-20 minutes at least every 2-3 hours to empty the breast.
- Start breastfeeding or pumping on the affected breast first. If this is too painful, you can start on the unaffected breast and move to the affected side after the let-down of your milk occurs.
- Try to position your baby with their chin or nose pointing toward the blockage to help drain the blocked area.
- You can massage the breast during the feeding to help drain the breast. Start at the blocked area and use your fingers to massage toward the nipple.

How should I care for myself?

- Get lots of rest. Ask relatives and friends to help with household tasks so you can concentrate on caring for your baby and getting well.
- Drink plenty of fluids and eat nutritious foods.
- If your health care provider has prescribed an antibiotic, take it as directed until it is completely gone.

What can I do to manage the pain?

- Apply warm compresses to the sore breast for 5 minutes before a feeding to help with the let-down of your milk. The compresses can help your milk to flow more easily. This can speed the healing process and relieve discomfort.
- Apply cold packs to the breast after a feeding to help reduce pain and swelling.
- Take acetaminophen or ibuprofen according to package instructions to relieve pain, aching and fever.

When should I call my health care provider?

- If you do not see an improvement of the infection within 24 hours after starting an antibiotic, call your health care provider.
- If you delivered your baby within the past 6 weeks, you can call Triage at (734) 764-8134.
- For general breastfeeding questions, please call the Lactation Help Line at (844) 200-8894. You will be asked to leave a message and a lactation consultant will return your call within 24 hours.

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