

Engorgement

The goal of our education materials is to provide medically accurate information that is inclusive of all parents and families. We invite you to have a conversation with your provider about the vocabulary and language that is most comfortable for you.

What is engorgement?

Engorgement is a filling of the breasts with increased amounts of milk, blood, and lymph fluid. Normal engorgement typically starts 3-5 days after giving birth and goes down within 24-48 hours (1-2 days).

How will my breasts feel when engorged?

You may experience only slight fullness of the breasts, or you may find the breasts become larger and heavier with increased tenderness or throbbing. The breasts can become hard with tightly stretched skin that may look shiny or feel warm. Engorgement can also extend up into the armpit and out to the end of the nipple. You may develop a low-grade fever, between 99.5-100.3° F (37.5-38.3° C).

What are some things I can do to help relieve engorgement?

Before feedings:

- Try to express a small amount of milk to soften the **areola** (the area around the nipple) to help your baby latch. You can do this with hand expression or with a breast pump on a low setting.

During feedings:

- Let your baby breastfeed (chestfeed) for as long as possible on the first breast before offering the second breast. The first breast should be noticeably softer after a feeding.
- Breastfeed your baby often. It is normal for a newborn baby to breastfeed as often as every hour, but don't go longer than 3-4 hours between feedings for the first week of your baby's life.

In between feedings:

- Allow your breast to rest between feedings.
 - Avoid deep massage or squeezing your breast.
 - Avoid overfeeding or overpumping.
- Use cold packs on the breasts for 20 minutes after feedings, keeping a layer of fabric between your skin and the cold pack.
- Try wearing a well-fitting, supportive bra to help reduce swelling and improve pain. Without a bra, fluid may collect in the bottom parts of your breast.
- Help with lymph fluid movement in your breast and avoid extra fluid build-up by doing **gentle lymphatic massage**. Gentle lymphatic massage helps your body get rid of swelling. You can do this massage using your hands (no special devices are needed). Use the tips of your fingers to practice very light touch massage from the nipple toward your neck.
 - Scan the QR code or click on the link to see an instructional video about massage to help with lymphatic drainage.

**Lymphatic Massage for the Breast During
Pregnancy and Lactation (IABLE):**

[youtube.com/watch?v=-0Uwx7L47cg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-0Uwx7L47cg)



What are some things I should avoid doing when my breasts feel engorged?

- Avoid using heat for breast comfort, as heat can increase swelling and inflammation. This can make it more difficult for milk to flow.
- Do not pump or express extra milk if your baby is breastfeeding well. Removing extra milk will cause your body to make extra milk, which can make engorgement worse.

Can I take any medication for the engorgement pain or discomfort?

You can take acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Motrin® or Advil®) as directed on the bottle to help with discomfort.

Should I use a breast pump to relieve engorgement?

During the normal period of engorgement that occurs 3-5 days after delivery, your body will know how much milk is necessary to feed your baby. As milk is removed, your body will respond by producing more milk. Unused milk that is held in the breast will cause your body to slow milk production. This is described as “supply and demand.”

- If your baby is latching well and breastfeeding often, you shouldn't need to pump more.
- You may be tempted to use your breast pump between feedings to relieve some of the pressure of engorgement, but you should limit these pumping sessions to only a couple minutes. Your goal should be to pump to comfort, but not empty the breasts.
- If your baby is not latching well, you should continue pumping for **15-20 minutes every 2-3 hours** until your baby is breastfeeding regularly.

Will my breasts get engorged again?

Engorgement can happen at any time while you're breastfeeding if your breasts are not emptied fully and frequently. Some of the risk factors for engorgement include:

- Your baby is sleeping longer than usual and missing a feeding.
- You have short or restricted feedings.
- Your baby is taking more feedings away from the breast (with supplements or when starting solid foods).

When should I call my healthcare provider?

- If your engorgement is not relieved within 48 hours, contact a lactation consultant for help.
 - Please call the Lactation Help Line at **(844) 200-8894**. We'll ask you to leave a message and a lactation consultant will return your call within 24 hours.
- If you notice signs of infection, including fever, redness, or swelling, contact your healthcare provider.
 - If you delivered your baby within the past 6 weeks, you can call Birth Center Triage at (734) 764-8134.

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Author: Kelly McCarley, MSN RN IBCLC RNC-MNN
Edited by: Brittany Batell, MPH MSW CHES®

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