

Engorgement with Breastfeeding



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
WEXNER MEDICAL CENTER

About engorgement

Your breasts begin making large amounts of milk 3 to 5 days after giving birth.

It is normal for breasts to become larger, heavier and tender. Breasts may also feel warm to the touch, leak, and lumps may develop in the milk glands as far back as the armpits. This is from the increase in milk, extra blood, and lymph fluids.

Normal fullness often decreases within the first 1 to 2 weeks after birth if your baby breastfeeds regularly.

Engorgement happens when the breasts are not emptied well or often enough. Breasts may become very hard and uncomfortable. This is not all milk, but other fluids too.

Preventing engorgement

- Breastfeed your baby soon after birth.
- Keep your baby in your room while in the hospital, so you can nurse 8 to 12 times every 24 hours.
- Work with your baby to get a deep latch. If you feel pain or pinching during breastfeeding, stop and ask for help from your lactation consultant.
- Feed your baby at least every 3 hours, and allow your baby to feed as long as he or she wants.

Signs of engorgement

- The breast swells and the areola (darkened area around nipple) feels hard and tight like your chin, instead of soft and elastic, like your earlobe.



- Breast tenderness may occur with throbbing pain. Low-grade fever of 100 degrees Fahrenheit or less with redness and warmth over the breasts.
- Flattened-out nipples that make it difficult for your baby to latch on.

Treating engorgement

Empty the Breast

- Once baby is latched correctly, gently massage the breast from the chest wall towards the baby to help the milk flow and milk ducts empty.

Breastfeed Often

- Nurse or remove milk at least every 2 to 3 hours. The more often you nurse, the sooner the engorgement will go away.
- Breastfeed on the first side until your baby no longer wants to nurse. If your baby does not take the second side, start on that breast at the next feeding.
- If the breast your baby doesn't take is uncomfortable, pump 2 to 3 minutes to remove some of your milk.

Use Cold Compresses After Feedings

- Use an ice pack or bag of frozen vegetables in a cloth on your breasts for 15 to 20 minutes to lessen swelling.

Wear Supportive Nursing Bra

- Use a supportive nursing bra for comfort, even at night. Avoid underwire bras, which may cause milk ducts to plug.

Use Non-Aspirin Pain Reliever

- Take a non-aspirin pain reliever such as ibuprofen (Advil) or acetaminophen (Tylenol) as directed by your doctor.

When engorgement causes problems with latching on

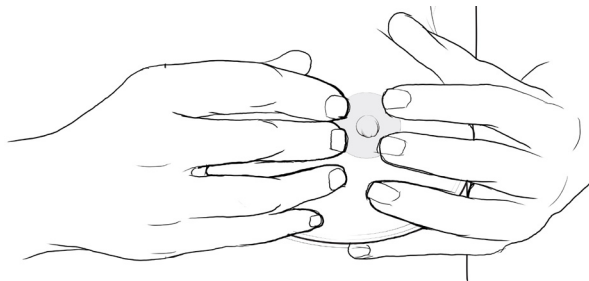
Your baby may not be able to get a deep latch if your breasts are engorged. This can lead to sore nipples and your baby having trouble draining the breast.

Express Some Milk First

To help with latching, soften the areola around the nipple by manually expressing milk or pumping your breasts before starting to breastfeed. Limit it to no more than 5 minutes of expressing or pumping.

Reverse Pressure Softening

Reverse Pressure Softening can help push the swelling back enough for your baby to latch on when you are engorged. Apply gentle pressure around the area of your areola by pressing in a 1 to 2 inch area around the base of the nipple. This will help move the swelling back away from your nipple to make it easier for your baby to latch on.



**Reverse
Pressure
Softening**

Other breast care tips

- Gently massage your breasts to get the milk flowing.
- Nurse your baby or pump your breasts at least 8 to 10 times a day until your breasts are softer and your milk supply has become regular.
- Use ice packs to relieve swelling and slow milk production between feedings for 20 minutes at a time, if desired.
- Take pain medicines as directed by your health care provider.
- Try wearing a supportive nursing bra 24 hours a day until breast swelling decreases.
- Avoid wearing tight fitting clothing and underwire bras.

When to call the doctor

These are signs you may have an infection, and an antibiotic may be needed. Please call your doctor if you have:

- Painful breasts
- Breasts that are hard with red streaks
- Flu-like symptoms, such as muscle aches, chills, or headache
- Fever of 100 degrees F or higher

Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

For more health information, contact the Library for Health Information at **614-293-3707** or e-mail **health-info@osu.edu**.