

San Maternity

Breast Fullness / Engorgement

Breastfeeding Information – Handout 14

Updated September 2023

Colostrum begins to transition to mature milk around day 3-5 after birth. This is commonly referred to as “the milk coming in”. During this time there is a greater blood flow to the breast which results in increased breast fullness and the sensation that the breasts are hot and heavy. Breast fullness doesn't affect how your baby attaches.

Sometimes the breasts become hard and lumpy, very tender and may flush pink. The nipple may also stretch and flatten. This is called engorgement. With appropriate treatment, engorgement usually resolves in 1-2 days.

However, you can also become very full or engorged once home if:

- Your baby goes longer between feeds or feeds for less time.
- They sleep for longer.
- They wean too quickly.
- You are pumping more milk than your baby needs

You can prevent engorgement by:

- Ensuring your baby is positioned well and attached deeply
- Keeping your baby in your room and feeding them on demand
- Allowing your baby to finish their feed at the breast before removing them
- Starting each feed on alternate breasts
- Waking baby for a feed if you feel full or uncomfortable
- Not removing more milk from the breast than the baby needs

You can relieve engorgement and help baby attach by using the following techniques.

General Information

- Breastfeed your baby as often as they need
- Common anti-inflammatory medication or pain relief medications can be helpful. Talk to your midwife or doctor about your options.

Before Feeds

Lymphatic drainage – prior to feeds, lymphatic drainage can reduce swelling, allowing the milk to flow more freely. It is important to avoid hard pressure as this may damage delicate breast tissue.

Technique (refer to diagram on right)

- Start with 10 small circles as shown.
- Then gently stroke upwards 10 – 3 times from under the breast as shown.



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Reverse pressure softening – Reverse pressure softening can be used to push back fluid around your nipple. This softens the area so your baby can attach more deeply.

Technique (Refer to diagram on the right)

- Use 2 or 3 straight fingers on each side, first knuckles touching the nipple. Push in and hold for 1-3 minutes or more. Repeat above and below the nipple.



Hand expressing – Hand expressing a few millilitres may also help soften the area around your nipple to help baby to attach more deeply.

After Feeds

Cold Packs – Cold packs after feeds may help reduce inflammation and provide comfort. Apply for 20mins every 1-2hrs or as needed.

For more information:

Australian Breastfeeding Association

p: 1800 686 268

w: www.breastfeeding.asn.au

Sydney Adventist Hospital Lactation Department

p: 02 9480 4071

w: www.sah.org.au/maternity

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