

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

Engorgement, blocked ducts and mastitis when breast/chest feeding

Engorgement, blocked ducts or mastitis can be uncomfortable and unpleasant when breast/chest feeding. Mastitis may lead to supplementing your feeding or stopping completely.

Engorgement (normal on day 3-4 after birth):

- Feed responsively (at least eight times in 24 hours).
- Hand express milk for baby if unable to latch and to soften the breast.
- Try reverse pressure softening to reduce fluid in the breast.
- Use ice packs on your breasts hourly.

Causes - blocked ducts and mastitis:

- Ineffective or shallow attachment during breast/chest feeding.
- Missed or shortened feeds.
- Giving bottles or dummies.
- An ill-fitting bra.
- Holding your breast/chest when feeding.

Blocked ducts

A blocked duct occurs when milk is unable to flow through the breast easily.

You may notice redness (if you have pale skin) or feel a tender spot or sore lump. Your breasts/chest may also feel full and tender (also known as engorged). Any engorgement or blocked ducts need to be treated promptly by feeding baby at least eight times in 24 hours to avoid this developing into severe inflammation.

Avoid repeated, more frequent feeding (which may cause overproduction of milk) and do not use aggressive massage as this may cause additional inflammation.

Mastitis

Mastitis (inflammation of the breast) happens when a blocked duct doesn't clear and causes localised swelling and inflammation. It is also possible for the breast to become infected.

If you have mastitis, you may feel ill with a fever or flu-like symptoms. If you have an infection as well, such symptoms will probably be worse.

Symptoms of mastitis:

- Red patches on your breast/chest (if you have white skin).
- Feel a hard sore lump in your breast.
- Feel achy and run down.
- Feel feverish with a temperature less than 38°C.

If flu like symptoms (fever, aches, and chills) last for 12-24 hours, please contact your GP as you may need antibiotics - these should only be prescribed for bacterial mastitis.

Take the full 10-14 days course of prescribed medication, rest and drink plenty of fluids.

How to treat mastitis before calling the GP and during antibiotic treatment:

- Keep feeding baby at least eight times in 24 hours to improve milk flow; don't feed with the aim of emptying the breast.
- If one breast is too swollen to feed, rest this breast and feed baby from the other side. Feed from both breasts when the swelling has reduced (you can increase milk production through normal feeding at least eight times in 24 hours).
- Aim for baby to breast/chest feed rather than using a pump as babies remove more milk than a pump.
- If baby is not feeding directly at the breast, then only express when baby wants to feed and give the expressed milk to baby.
- Avoid deep massage; use light sweeping of the skin instead. Gentle breast compressions can be used whilst baby is feeding or you are using the pump.
- Avoid nipple shields.
- Take ibuprofen to reduce inflammation, and for pain take paracetamol. Ice packs can be applied hourly.
- Treat nipple blebs (milk blisters) - do not use a needle.
- Ask your infant feeding specialist for support if you have an oversupply of milk.
- Look after your mental health and talk to a member of staff who can support you during this time.

It is important to keep feeding - your milk is not infected, and your baby will not be harmed by drinking it.

To help avoid future problems:

- Breastfeed your baby frequently (avoiding long periods between feeds), day and night.
- Keeping your baby in the same room as you can make night feeds easier.

- Treat any engorgement promptly and check that all areas of your breast feel soft and comfortable after feeds.
- Take extra care of yourself or consider expressing when there are changes in routine which may cause longer gaps between feeds, such as holidays, special occasions or family events.

Contact details:

- **Natalie Boxall, Infant Feeding Midwife** – telephone 01623 622515, extension 6095
- **Lime Green Team (9am-5pm)** – telephone 01623 676170
- **Sherwood Birthing Unit** – telephone 01623 672244
- **Out of Hours GP** – telephone 111.

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions
Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service:

King's Mill Hospital: 01623 672222

Newark Hospital: 01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net.

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