

# Mastitis and Breastfeeding

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## Mastitis and Breastfeeding

Mastitis means an inflammation of the breast and can start with ineffective drainage of milk from the breast. If your baby is not attached effectively to the breast, it may be hard for your baby to take the full amount of breast milk well. Unless this is improved you may get repeated episodes of mastitis. If you are unsure if your baby is well attached to the breast, please ask your midwife, health visitor or volunteer breastfeeding supporter to watch a feed and support you to effectively attach your baby.

The information in this leaflet will help you notice the signs of mastitis and give you some advice on how to manage it.

## Preventing Mastitis.

Prevention is always better than cure so ensure:

- Your baby is well attached to the breast; ask for advice if you are unsure.
- Let your baby finish the feed. Most babies will release the breast when they have finished feeding. Try not to take your baby off the breast unless the feed is finished.
- Try to avoid suddenly leaving long periods between feeds.
- Make sure your breasts do not become overfull. If your breasts feel overfull, wake your baby and encourage him/her to feed to empty your breasts for you.
- Prevent engorgement by encouraging your baby to feed frequently, especially in the first few weeks, at least 8 times per day, including at night.
- Avoid pressure on your breasts from tight clothing, including bras, and your fingers when feeding.

- Rest when your baby rests.
- Start self help measures as soon as you think you may be developing mastitis. The symptoms of mastitis are listed below.

## Signs of Mastitis

The signs of mastitis can differ between different women but can develop very quickly, sometimes in a few hours. Signs of mastitis to look out for are:

- A red area on part of the breast which may be painful to touch.
- A lumpy area of the breast which may be painful to touch.
- Aching in the whole breast which feels hot to touch
- Flu like symptoms such as a temperature, aches and pains, tiredness and feeling tearful.

You may experience one or more of these symptoms

## Self Help Measures.

It is important to know how to help resolve the problem as you may not be able to contact your midwife or health visitor for several hours after you discover the first symptoms of mastitis.

The following actions may help to resolve the mastitis and also prevent engorgement and clear blocked ducts:

- Check your baby is positioned and attached to the breast well. Your midwife or health visitor can help you with this.
- Continue to breastfeed as this is the quickest way to get better. Your baby will not be hurt by continuing to breastfeed and providing

the attachment is effective; will be the best way to remove the milk that is causing the inflammation.

- Feed your baby more frequently, or express between feeds to prevent your breasts from feeling uncomfortable.
- Feed from the affected breast first so that it is drained as thoroughly as possible.
- Express by hand after each feed to ensure that they are drained as much as possible. Keep expressing until you feel better, then gradually decrease this over several days.
- Try feeding your baby in different positions.
- Before your baby feeds, hand express a small amount of milk to soften the nipple and areola so the baby can attach more effectively.
- Warm flannels on the breast may help to release some of the milk if you are having difficulty when expressing.
- Gentle stroking or massaging the breast and the affected area may help to make expressing more effective.
- Check that your clothing and nursing bras are not too tight and restricting milk flow from the breast.
- Rest whilst your baby is sleeping and try to eat and drink normally as this may make you feel better in yourself.

## What next?

You should contact your midwife, health visitor or GP if the self help measures do not ease the symptoms of mastitis that you are experiencing.

Your GP can prescribe a course of antibiotics and anti-inflammatory medication that may help you recover. Not all mastitis requires antibiotics but they may be needed if self help measures are not providing improvement. Most antibiotics are safe to take whilst breastfeeding but ensure your doctor is aware you are still breastfeeding if antibiotics are prescribed. Some babies will experience runnier stools if you are taking antibiotics, but the baby will not be harmed and this will improve once you have finished the course.

Anti-inflammatory medications will reduce the inflammation, relieve pain and reduce your temperature. Please consult with your GP about dosage and types of medication to take.

## References

- NICE.(2008) Postnatal Care, REF.CG37 (WWW document).  
[www.nice.org.uk/guidance/CG37](http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/CG37)
- Mastitis and Breastfeeding Leaflet produced by The Breastfeeding Network 2009

The Trust cannot accept any responsibility for the accuracy of the information given if the leaflet is not used by RD&E staff undertaking procedures at the RD&E hospitals.

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