

Nipple Pain & Trauma

Algorithm

by Nancy Mohrbacher, IBCLC

Mother Reports Nipple Pain or Behavioral Indicators of Pain

Take History

- Baby's age/birth experience/weight gain/gestational age at birth
- Previous breastfeeding problems/duration of problem
- Type and degree of pain (1-10)
- Relation of pain to feeding (at start only, throughout, between)
- Pregnancy possible?
- Other maternal injury/skin problem
- Prior breast/nipple care/products
- Use of breast pump (type) or bottles/pacifiers

Assess Mother & Baby

- Latch-on/Positioning/Fit
- Mother's breasts/nipples
 - Unusual anatomy
 - Engorgement
 - Skin conditions (rash, redness, etc.)
 - Broken skin/stage of nipple trauma
- Baby—unusual anatomy (tongue tie, etc.), suck, teething

Yes

Instruct mother to report signs & symptoms of complications (bacterial or yeast infection/mastitis) and refer as indicated

Skin Broken?

No

Direct Treatment at Suspected Cause

Initiate Comfort Measures

- Put baby to least sore breast first
- Stimulate MER before nursing
- Wear hydrogels indicated for nipple pain and trauma or apply USP modified lanolin and/or wear breast shells between feedings
- Take analgesia for pain

YES

Continue treatment

Improvement within 24-48 hours?

NO

Reassess mother and baby or refer as indicated

If within normal limits:

- Educate
- Initiate comfort measures
- Provide reassurance

Troubleshoot as indicated

Suspect latch-on problem if:

- Linear cracks on nipple
- Fissures on nipple
- Misshapen nipple at detachment
- Any trauma on face of nipple

Suspect allergic reaction if:

- Wheals
- Hives
- Scales
- Rash (some types)

Treatments for Nipple Trauma By Stage

Stage I: Expressed milk or USP modified lanolin or indicated hydrogel

Stage II: USP modified lanolin or indicated hydrogel or indicated OTC antibiotic ointment or indicated Rx ointment

Stage III: USP modified lanolin or indicated hydrogel or indicated OTC antibiotic ointment or indicated Rx ointment

Stage IV: Indicated hydrogel or indicated OTC antibiotic ointment or indicated Rx ointment



Proposed System of Rating Nipple Trauma

Stage I—Superficial Intact

- Pain or irritation with no skin breakdown
- Could include: redness (erythema), bruising (ecchymosis), red spots (petechiae), edema (swelling)

Stage II—Superficial with Tissue Breakdown

- Pain reported
- Could include: abrasion, shallow crack or fissure, compression stripe, hematoma, shallow ulceration

Stage III—Partial Thickness Erosion

- Skin breakdown includes the destruction of the epidermis to the lower layers of the dermis
- Could include: deep fissure, blister, deep ulceration with more advanced erosion

Stage IV—Full Thickness Erosion

- Deeper damage through the dermis
- Could include: Full erosion of some parts of the nipple

References for Nipple Pain and Trauma Algorithm

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