

Sore Nipples & Engorgements



Tender nipples and breasts can occur during the early weeks of breastfeeding. Here are some ways to increase your comfort so you can enjoy this time more.

What causes sore nipples?

Sore nipples can happen anytime, but most often the first 1-2 weeks after delivery. It can be mild to severe soreness. Some discomfort can happen the first minute or two of breastfeeding as your baby pulls the nipple into the right position. This is normal, but soreness after the first minute or two is not. The most common cause of soreness after the first few minutes is poor positioning and latch. Other causes include: breast engorgement or infection, sensitivities to nipple ointments or creams, or the misuse of nipple shields or breast pumps.

Can I prevent sore nipples?

Yes. The best way to prevent sore nipples is to help your baby latch on the right way. Remember these tips:

1. Bring your baby to you with a wide open mouth.
2. Sandwich your breast in a C or U-hold to help your baby take a deep mouthful of your nipple and areola.
3. Aim your nipple up towards your baby's roof of her mouth towards the comfort zone.

How do I know my baby is latched on well?

Here are some signs that your baby is latched well:

- You feel a tugging, but no pain, rubbing or pinching while breastfeeding. Some discomfort the first minute or two when your baby first latches can be normal the first few weeks.
- Your baby's lower lip is rolled out.
- Your baby has most of your areola in her mouth.
- Your baby's chin is touching your breast and there is a small space between her nose and your breast.

How can I help the soreness go away?

- Fix the cause of your sore nipples. Get help from a lactation consultant to help you figure out why you are getting sore.
- Soothe your sore nipples by applying:
 - Expressed breast milk
 - An ointment* for sore nipples that states it does not need to be removed before breastfeeding. Apply only a thin layer to the nipples after breastfeeding.
 - Hydrogel pads* that are placed directly over the nipple, under your bra between breastfeeding and can last several days.

*Make sure to read the product instructions before using any of these nipple care products.

Engorgements

What causes engorgement?

Engorgement happens when the breasts become swollen from infrequent, delayed or missed breastfeedings (or pumpings if your baby is unable to breastfeed yet). Engorged breasts can be hard, painful, red and hot to the touch. Keep in mind, most women experience some breast fullness the first 2-3 days after their baby is born. This fullness happens as your milk volume increases. Do not confuse this with engorgement.

Can I prevent engorgement?

Yes. Here are some ways to prevent engorged breasts:

- Breastfeed right after your baby is born.
- Breastfeed on demand, when your baby is showing hunger cues. This will be about every 2-3 hours. Do not skip feedings at night.
- Breastfeed on one side as long as your baby wishes to help drain your breast well. Listen and if you hear swallows, let her keep sucking on that side. If your breasts feels less full and you cannot hear swallowing any longer, offer the second side. She may or may not want more.
- Begin each feeding with the breast she drained the least. Usually this is the side she breastfed the least amount of time on.
- Avoid delaying or missing a feeding. Avoid supplementation.
- Avoid wearing bras that are too tight.
- If you are pumping for your baby who cannot breastfeed yet:
 - Start pumping as soon as possible, within 6 hours of your baby's birth.
 - Avoid missing a pumping session.
 - Make sure to drain your breasts well by massaging your breasts before and during pumping and doing hand expression after.

Correct positioning and latch can help you avoid sore nipples and engorgement.



How can I help the engorgement go away?

It is important to treat engorgement before it gets too painful. Severe pressure and swelling can cause breast tissue damage. Here are some ways to help:

- Apply cold after breastfeeding. Ice packs or a bag of frozen peas wrapped in a wet washcloth work well. Some mothers find that cold, raw, clean cabbage leaves provide relief. If using cabbage leaves, rinse before using. Place the cabbage leaf in your bra for 15-30 minutes two to three times a day. Avoid cabbage if you are allergic to it or develop a skin rash.
- To make milk flow easier:
 - Gently press on the areola with the pads of your fingers, in towards your breast for a minute or two. This will help soften the areola so your baby can latch easier.
 - Hand express or pump to start the milk flow.
 - Gently massage your breasts.

This is general information and does not replace the advice your healthcare provider. If you have a problem you cannot solve quickly, seek help right away. Every baby is different. If in doubt, contact your physician or other healthcare provider.