

Full Breasts - Information for patients and carers

Around the third or fourth day after you give birth, your breasts start to produce lots of milk. This is known as the milk 'coming in'. Your breasts may produce much more milk than your baby needs and they may feel full and uncomfortable. **This will only last for a few days.** Most women feel their breasts softening from around 7 to 10 days after birth.

When your milk first comes in

- Your nipple and the dark area around it (the areola) may become full and firm and it may be difficult for your baby to attach properly to your breasts.
- Your baby may not take all your milk from your breasts during feeds. After feeds, your breasts may still feel quite full and uncomfortable.
- Some babies can be unsettled during this time and want to feed very frequently.
- Your baby might have lots of loose, greenish bowel motions.

Breastfeeding when your breasts are very full

- Good positioning and attachment is important. Ask your midwife/nurse for help if needed.
- Soften your areola by hand expressing before attaching your baby to your breasts. This will make it easier for your baby to attach.
- Do 'reverse pressure softening' by holding the flat of your fingers over the nipple/areola and push in gently for a minute or two. This can help move some of the swelling away from your areola and help soften it.
- Offer one breast per feed. Don't swap sides unless the first breast feels much softer after your baby finishes feeding from it.
- If your baby asks for another feed within an hour, feed again from the same breast.
- If your baby is still hungry after the first breast is 'finished', you can offer the second breast.
- If your baby only feeds from one breast at a feed and the other breast is uncomfortably full, express a small amount of milk for comfort but don't completely drain your breasts.
- Change the side that you begin the feed on each time you start a new feed.

TIP: Use a hair tie on your wrist, a clip on your shirt or bra or a pin in your hair to help you remember which side you are due to feed on next.

Key Points

First Feed:

- Feed from one side.
- Feed from the same side if baby wants more within the hour.
- Let the other side drip or express a **small** amount for comfort.

Next Feed:

- Feed from the **other** side.
- Feed from the same side if baby wants more within the hour.
- Let the other side drip or express as before.

- Change the side that you **begin** the feed on each time you start a new feed.
- Keep breastfeeding your baby frequently if your breasts are very full.
- Express for comfort if needed but avoid too much expressing.

Relieving discomfort between feeds

- If your breasts are very uncomfortable between feeds, you can express a small amount of milk to relieve the fullness.
- Before breastfeeding or expressing, place a warm (not hot) pack on your breasts for a few minutes or have a warm shower or bath.
- Let some milk drip from one side into a towel or container while feeding from the other breast.
- Wear a supportive bra but make sure it doesn't dig in. Some women feel more comfortable without a bra at this time.
- After breastfeeding or expressing, place a covered cold pack, frozen nappy or packet of frozen vegetables on your breasts.
- Paracetamol (Panadol) or Ibuprofen (Nurofen) may be taken for pain relief

Key Point

Once your breasts are feeling softer and more comfortable, start to offer both breasts at each feed again. Continue to let your baby 'finish' the first side before offering the second.

- **What to look out for:**
- **A blocked duct** can cause a tender, reddish area on your breast. You may feel a small lumpy area under your skin but otherwise, you feel well. To treat a blocked duct, apply warmth, and **VERY** gently massage the lump in a circle and towards your nipple. You can do this while feeding, expressing or in the shower or bath. Try positioning your baby so that his/her chin points towards the lump as this may help to clear the blockage. If the blockage does not clear within 24 hours, seek advice from one of the contact numbers below.
- **Mastitis** is a breast inflammation or infection. Your breast might be red, swollen and painful. You may develop a fever and feel unwell. It is more common when the breasts are over-full, if feeds are missed, or if a blocked duct goes untreated. Mothers who are run-down or very tired are more prone to mastitis.
- To prevent mastitis, make sure your baby is well positioned and attached, feed regularly according to your baby's needs and try not to let your breasts become over-full. Try to rest, eat well and look after yourself. If you think you have mastitis, seek advice from one of the contact numbers below.
- **If you feel unwell you should see your GP or go to the Emergency Department as soon as possible.** You may need treatment with antibiotics, but you can keep breastfeeding.

Useful contacts

The Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) 24-hour helpline

Ph. 1800 686 268 www.breastfeeding.asn.au

Ballarat Health Service Breastfeeding Clinic Ph. 0439981937

Parent Place Breastfeeding Support – Thursdays by appointment

Cnr. Sturt and Albert Streets, Ballarat Central Ph. 0439981937

Ballarat Health Service Maternity Unit Ph. 53204971

24 Hour Maternal and Child Health Advice Line Ph. 132229.

