

San Maternity

Management of Mastitis

Breastfeeding Information – Handout 11

Updated September 2023

What is Mastitis?

Mastitis is an inflammatory condition of the breast, which may or may not be accompanied by infection. Signs and symptoms of mastitis may include:

- Red, painful, hot and swollen breast
- Fevers, chills, fast heart rate and aching joints

What causes Mastitis?

Inadequate emptying of the breast can cause milk to infiltrate surrounding tissue leading to inflammation. This can occur when there is:

- Oversupply of milk
- Long breaks between feeds or feeds are skipped
- Pumping more milk than baby needs
- Ineffective sucking/poor attachment
- Changes in feeding patterns i.e. weaning

Pressure can also damage delicate breast tissue and stir up inflammation. This may result from:

- Wearing a tight bra
- Pressure from a bag or seat belt
- Massaging the breast

Sometimes there is no obvious cause, but predisposing factors include tiredness, stress and skipping meals.

Prevention of Mastitis

- Make sure your baby is positioned and attached well so they are effectively removing milk
- Allow your baby to feed when they are hungry (newborns often feed 8-12 times in 24hours)
- Do not interrupt a feed if baby is still sucking well and swallowing
- Do not miss feeds or stretch the time between feeds
- If your breasts feel full, wake your baby for a feed. Please see our handout on breast fullness and engorgement for other ideas
- Avoid tight fitting bra's/clothes
- Do not massage/knead the breast. This will not help remove lumps but will damage underlying tissue

Treatment

When you have mastitis, your breastmilk is still safe for your baby and it is important to keep breastfeeding on demand. If your baby is unwilling or unable to feed, hand express or use a breast pump to remove the milk regularly.

If you are pumping exclusively, continue to remove milk regularly with no more than 4hours between each expression.

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Before you breastfeed or express, it is helpful to reduce swelling so that the milk can flow more freely. You can achieve this using lymphatic drainage according to the following technique (refer to diagram on right):

- Start with 10 small circles below the neck and in the armpit
- Then gently stroke upwards 10 – 30 times from under the breast.



After baby has fed, it can be helpful to put cold packs on the affected area for 20mins. You can repeat this every 1-2hrs or as needed. Avoid placing cold on the nipple as it can cause pain.

Take pain relief according to the directions on the packet or as instructed by your doctor. Paracetamol and anti-inflammatories are safe to take when breastfeeding.

If you do not feel better within 12-24hrs or feel worse before this time, you should see a doctor as soon as possible. When making an appointment with a GP be sure to tell them you have mastitis as you need to be seen quickly. If antibiotics are prescribed take them as directed. It is safe to take these antibiotics when breastfeeding.

Until you are feeling better it is important to rest as much as you are able, eat regularly and increase your fluid intake.

For more information:

Australian Breastfeeding Association

p: 1800 686 268

w: www.breastfeeding.asn.au

Lactation Consultants of Australia & New Zealand

w: www.lcanz.org

Sydney Adventist Hospital Lactation Department

p: 02 9480 4071

w: www.sah.org.au/maternity

ABM Protocols

w: www.bfmed.org/protocols

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