



HEALTH DIVISION
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BREASTFEEDING ENGORGEMENT

Signs & Symptoms • Prevention • Treatment

It is normal for your breasts to get full and heavier in the first week after delivery when your milk supply increases. If breastfeeding is going well, breast fullness lessens within 24 hours. When normal fullness is not relieved your breasts can become engorged, which will cause your breasts to feel hard, swollen, tender and uncomfortably full.

Signs & Symptoms

- Breasts become very full, hard, tender and warm to the touch.
- Skin of the breast may be stretched and appear shiny.
- Nipple may increase in size and flatten, making it hard for baby to latch.
- You may experience a low grade fever

Prevention Tips

- If possible, feed baby within the first hour of birth.
- Breastfeed when baby shows signs of hunger and for as long as the baby wants.
- Nurse often, 8-12 times or more in 24 hours. Don't skip feedings, even at night.
- Make sure baby is latched and positioned correctly. Some initial discomfort may occur when a baby first latches, pain should not continue the entire feeding. If unsure, ask a lactation professional for help.
- Allow your baby to finish the first breast before you offer the other breast. The baby might not take the second breast; you can offer it at the next feeding.
- Avoid pacifiers in the first few weeks.
- Don't give your baby anything other than breast milk, unless told by a health care provider.
- If baby is not nursing well, hand express or use a breast pump to fully drain the breast.
- If weaning baby from the breast, do so gradually.

Treatment

- Express milk before the feeding so it's easier for your baby to latch onto your breast. You can hand express or use a breast pump.
- Apply warm, moist towels to your breasts a few minutes before nursing to help milk flow.
- Try Reverse Pressure Softening: https://kellymom.com/bf/concerns/mother/rev_pressure_soft_cotterman/
- Gently massage breast during the nursing session to increase milk flow, which encourages baby to suckle.

For Comfort:

- Relax in a warm shower and hand express milk.
- Hand express or use a breast pump if breasts feel full after nursing.
- Cover both breasts with a cold compress between feedings to reduce pain and swelling.
- Avoid tight or poorly fitting bras. They can lead to plugged ducts or mastitis.
- Ask your health care provider about pain medication.



Shown: Manual Breast Pump

Need Help?

Contact a lactation consultant if:

- Engorgement becomes severe and is not relieved by the above measures within 24 hours.
- Your baby is having trouble latching or you feel pain when nursing.
- Call WIC's breastfeeding peers at 248-858-1272

Contact your health care provider if:

- You have symptoms of mastitis (red, painful breasts with a temperature greater than 100.6 degrees F).
- You have any concerns about your baby.

Adapted from the Missouri Department of Health & Senior Services / WIC & Nutrition Services "Breastfeeding Engorgement."