

Breast Engorgement when Breastfeeding/Expressing

Reviewed August 2019

What is Breast Engorgement?

Engorgement is when the breast becomes very full or swollen with extra fluid and breastmilk. The swelling may extend up into your armpits.

Full breasts are a normal process as your breastmilk volume increases and you feel changes in your breasts during the first 10-14 days, after the birth of your baby.

When breastmilk production increases rapidly – the volume of breastmilk may exceed the breast cells capacity to store it. If the breastmilk is **not removed efficiently and frequently** from the breast – some fluid may leak into the space surrounding the milk cells and this causes breast engorgement. This is a temporary condition and may only last for a few days.

Normal Breast Fullness – What you may feel

Usually your full breast is still able to be moved and shaped to breastfeed. Your baby will be able to latch comfortably and efficiently without trauma to the breast tissue.

Breast size increases, breasts become firmer; they may be tender/painful to touch in some areas.

Severe Breast Engorgement

Some women's breasts may fill very quickly and be very painful.

Their breasts are very hard and the breast tissue is not flexible at all. If the breastmilk is not removed frequently it may pool and backlog in the breast and it can be difficult for the baby to attach to the breast.

Preventing Breast Engorgement

- Early breastfeeds and frequent removal of breastmilk by breastfeeding or breast expression – (IF YOUR BABY IS IN NICU) - 8-10 times in 24 hours helps to prevent engorgement.
- Keep baby skin-to-skin frequently and watch for baby's feeding cues.
- Try to have a deep latch with a large mouthful of breast tissue when you latch your baby. Ask the Midwife to assist you if you are having difficulty latching your baby to your breast
- Maximise the drainage of your breasts by applying breast compression throughout the breastfeed or when you are expressing breastmilk.
- Some women find hand expressing or pumping, for 5-10 minutes, following a breastfeed may also help to relieve the pressure inside the breast.



How to treat Breast Engorgement

- **DO NOT WEAR A BRA FOR THE FIRST FEW WEEKS**
- When your breasts are full and painful during breastfeeding – expose both breasts so they may leak breastmilk.
- Latch baby to one side and massage the other breast to allow breastmilk to drip freely.
- During the breastfeed keep returning your baby to the same breast until the breast has softened and is more comfortable. If baby wants more breastmilk then offer the second breast.
- At your next breastfeed start on the alternate breast to the one you started on at the last feed. Continue alternating with the above feeding until your breasts are more comfortable.
- If your baby is in NICU and you are expressing your breastmilk - express until both breasts are softened and comfortable – no time limit.

ICE PACKS may be used for comfort and to reduce swelling in the breast before and after breastfeeds and/or breast expression.

HEAT PACKS prior to feeds may be helpful to assist with milk flow

AREOLA OEDEMA (swelling)

- **FLOWER MASSAGE** (called -Reverse Pressure Softening Massage) prior to feeds can assist with softening to enable baby to achieve a deeper latch. Ask your midwife to demonstrate the technique.

Reference:

Walker, Marsha 2017. "Breastfeeding Management for the Clinician – Using the Evidence" Fourth Edition. Jones and Bartlett Learning.