

# Engorgement When Breastfeeding: What You Need To Know

## Engorgement

Sometime between the third and fourth day of breastfeeding, your milk volume increases. The increase in milk volume is also known as “the milk coming in.” When the milk volume increases, you can feel:

- fullness
- warmth
- heaviness
- swelling.

Breast fullness is a normal and common part of breastfeeding. In general, it lasts for 24 to 48 hours. If the milk is not being removed from both breasts often, you will have engorgement.

Signs of engorgement include:

- hard, firm and painful breasts
- shiny-looking skin
- stretched or flattened nipple (by the pressure of the milk building up).

Engorgement may make it difficult for your baby to latch-on and remove milk. A poor latch can cause nipple damage.

Breastfeeding your baby often as the milk volume is increasing is the best way to avoid engorgement. Offering your baby a bottle, delaying or skipping a feeding will make the symptoms worse.

Engorgement is more common as the milk comes in but can occur any time while breastfeeding if feedings are skipped or delayed.

If left untreated, engorgement can damage the cells that produce milk and can decrease the amount of milk you make.

## How to Care for Engorgement

- **Breastfed your baby every 1 to 3 hours with the goal of feeding 8 to 12 times in 24 hours.** This is the best thing you can do. Feeding your baby often around the clock during the first days of breastfeeding is important.
- **Apply moist warmth (such as warm, wet washcloth) to your breasts.** Once your breasts are engorged, some milk needs to be removed before your baby will be able to latch correctly. Doing any of the following before removing milk will help improve milk flow. When your baby is latched well, you can prevent damage to the nipple.

Apply warmth to your breasts for up to 5 minutes before you breastfeed, express milk or both. (Using warmth longer than 5 minutes before a feed you will make the swelling worse.)

**(over)**

Options to apply warmth are:

- Take a warm shower.
- Apply a warm, moist towel over your breast.
- Stand over a bowl of warm water and put your breast in the water.
  - Fill a large bowl with warm tap water.
  - Lean over the bowl to let your breast soak in the warm water for a few minutes.
- Manually express milk while taking a shower. Or, do gentle breast massage while taking a shower.
- Do gentle breast massage while you apply warmth to your breast. Doing this just before removing milk can be soothing.
- After a few minutes of warmth to the breast, remove enough milk so your breast feels less firm and it is easier for baby to latch-on.
  - In general, hand expressing will work better than using a breast pump.
  - An electric pump can be used at low settings if necessary to remove milk, making it easier for your baby to latch-on.
- **Use gentle massage with the palm of your hand during feeding if it is comfortable.** This will help your baby remove milk. If your breast still feels full after your baby has fed, you may use a breast pump for comfort.

If you pump after feeding, remove just enough milk to make your breast softer. Then put a cool compress on your breast and the armpit area for 15 to 20 minutes after feeding. Feed your baby again in 1 to 2 hours.
- **Take ibuprofen (Advil® or Motrin®) or acetaminophen (Tylenol®) for discomfort.** Follow the package instructions.

You may need to do some or all of these tips to help your baby latch-on during more than one feeding.

## When to Call Your Health Care Provider

Call your health care provider if:

- engorgement does not get better in 24 to 48 hours
- your baby does not latch-on well
- your baby cannot latch-on
- you have any of these symptoms:
  - fever
  - chills
  - body aches
  - flu-like symptoms (feeling tired, rundown and achy)
  - breast pain (part or all of your breast is painful, tender, red and swollen).

## How to Tell if Your Baby is Getting Enough Breastmilk

In general, you can tell if your baby is getting enough milk if he or she:

- feeds 8 to 12 times in 24 hours
- has bursts of sucking and swallowing
- appears satisfied after feeding
- has enough wet and soiled diapers based on his or her age
- regains his or her birth weight in 10 to 14 days.

## Whom To Call With Questions

If you have questions or concerns about your baby's health (including feeding and weight gain), talk with your baby's health care provider.

Talk with your lactation consultant or your nurse if you have questions or concerns about breastfeeding.