

Breast Engorgement

Breastmilk usually "comes in" sometime during the first week after delivery. This means your milk changes from colostrum, or early milk, to mature milk. Your body may make more than your baby needs during this period and it is easy to become overly full.

To prevent engorgement:

- Nurse frequently, about 8-12 times per day
- Make sure your baby latches-on well so he will empty your breasts effectively.
- Do not skip feedings or give formula feedings during the first several weeks.

For moderate engorgement: (Your breasts are as firm as the tip of your nose):

- Apply heat before feedings to soften the breast and encourage the let-down reflex.
- Stand in the shower and let warm water run over your breasts. This will feel good and encourage leaking.
- Do some gentle breast massage. Make circular motions in small areas with your finger tips and move your hand all around the breast. Then stroke from the outer breast toward the nipple.
- Express some milk from the areola. Place your hand in a "C" position at the breast, fingers under and thumb on top. Position your fingers about 1 to 1 ½' from the base of the nipple. Gently push back towards your chest, then roll your fingers toward the nipple. Repeat several times, then rotate your hand around the breast to drain all areas. (See pictures below)

Breast Engorgement – how to hand express to relieve pressure



Place your fingers behind the edge of the areola



Press your fingers back toward your chest



Squeeze
and roll your fingers towards the edge of your areola



Rotate your hand to empty all sections of your breast

- Continue to rotate your hand around the entire breast
- Empty one breast, then repeat the process on the other breast. Go back and express each breast again to remove additional milk.
- Apply cold after feedings to reduce the swelling and provide comfort. You can use ice packs or bags of frozen peas wrapped in a light towel. Apply for 10 - 20 minutes.

**For extreme engorgement:
(Your breasts are as hard as your forehead)**

Apply cold to the breasts, no heat. This will reduce swelling, slow the re-filling of the breasts and provide some comfort.



Either ice in a re-sealable bag or bags of frozen vegetables over the breasts will feel good and reduce swelling. Use a towel or cloth between you and the ice.

Cabbage leaves may be applied to the breasts before feedings to reduce swelling. Although this may sound like an unusual treatment, many women have found it effective in relieving the pain and fullness of engorgement. Place the chilled cabbage leaf in your bra for 15-30 minutes 2-3 times per day or until your breasts begin to soften. Not more. More can reduce your milk supply.

Do not use cabbage applications if you are allergic to cabbage, sulfa drugs or you develop a skin rash.



Scrape (or pound) the cabbage to release the juices.



Apply cabbage to your breasts



Wear the cabbage inside your bra for 15-30 minutes at a time.

- You may need to use a breast pump for a few minutes to remove some milk from your breasts before feedings. This will help soften and shape the nipple to make it easier for the baby to latch-on.
- If your baby doesn't empty your breasts sufficiently during feedings or only feeds on one breast, you may need to use a breast pump after feedings for a day or two. It is important to treat engorgement before your breasts become very full and painful. This back pressure on the milk producing cells in your breast can damage them and reduce your over-all milk supply.