



# Common breastfeeding concerns

## Swollen breasts, blocked ducts, mastitis

### Remember...

- Swollen breasts and blocked milk ducts are uncomfortable and mastitis can cause flu-like symptoms, but all three can be treated readily.
- Drainage of the affected breast is very important.
- Check your baby is positioned and attached correctly.
- Most antibiotics for mastitis are safe for breastfeeding mothers.
- Contact a breastfeeding trained health professional or doctor for help.

### Swollen breasts

Swollen breasts in the first few weeks can be normal. It can also happen when there has been a long separation from the baby or when breastfeeding has been stopped too suddenly. Some mothers get concerned that they have too much milk. This is only a temporary problem and will sort itself out as your body gets used to breastfeeding.

### Tips

- Wear a comfortable, supporting bra that is not too tight.
- Take your bra off to feed when able and let the milk flow freely from the second breast onto a towel.
- Massage your breasts gently during feeds.
- If your baby is having difficulty attaching, gently express a small amount of milk to soften the areola (the darker area around the nipple) before a feed.
- Demand feed your baby to keep your breasts comfortable (8–10 feeds or more in 24 hours).
- If your breasts become painful, seek assistance from a breastfeeding trained health professional.

Weaning is also a common time for swollen breasts and mastitis. If your breasts become engorged when cutting down the number of feeds, you may need to express a little for comfort to prevent the risk of mastitis. Too much expressing may stimulate further milk production.

### Blocked milk duct

Blocked milk ducts appear as a hard, tender lump, which may or may not be red.

### Tips

- Feed your baby as often as possible starting with the affected breast.
- Gently massage the lump towards the nipple while your baby is feeding to help clear the blockage.
- Start each feed on the affected side for 2–3 consecutive feeds to help the breast drain. Then offer the second breast or express for comfort.
- To improve drainage of the affected area, it is best to have the baby's chin pointing towards the blocked duct.
- If your baby's feeding has not reduced the lump, gently massage toward the nipple while hand expressing.
- Apply warmth before a feed and cold afterwards to the area. (A warm shower or a cool compress can relieve pain or discomfort.)
- Check your bra is not too tight and remove during feeds if you prefer.
- Sleep without a bra as much as possible.
- Positioning and attachment should be checked.

If a blocked duct persists for longer than 12–24 hours, seek assistance from a breastfeeding trained health professional.

### Mastitis

Symptoms of mastitis include:

- inflammation of the breast
- hot, red, painful breast
- flu-like symptoms, eg. fever, headaches and aching joints.

Symptoms can include all or some of these points.

### Tips

- Continue to breastfeed – mastitis is not a reason to stop breastfeeding.
- Follow tips as above for blocked ducts.
- If you are experiencing flu-like symptoms and fever, see your GP immediately.
- Most antibiotics for mastitis are safe for the breastfeeding mother. Talk to your GP or pharmacist about your treatment.
- Rest and plenty of fluids are important.

### Remember

- Drainage of the affected breast is very important.
- Check your attachment is correct.

### Acknowledgements

This fact sheet is consistent with current Infant Feeding Guidelines and Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia, as produced by the National Health and Medical Research Council.

It is also based on information drawn heavily from:

- Infant and Toddler Feeding Guide, Department of Nutrition and Dietetics, Royal Children's Hospital and Health Service District, 2004.
- Breastfeeding: A Simple Guide to Help You Establish Breastfeeding, Community Child Health Service, Royal Children's Hospital and Health Service District, 2004.
- Growing Strong: Feeding You and Your Baby, Public Health Services, Queensland Health, 2003.
- Optimal Infant Nutrition: Evidence Based Guidelines 2003-2008, Queensland Health, 2003.

This fact sheet is also the result of input and effort from many health professionals in Queensland. Their help with the content is greatly appreciated.

To access the full set of fact sheets, go to <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/child&youth/factsheets>.

