

Plugged Ducts

One or more of the milk ducts may become blocked. This is usually caused by incomplete emptying of the breast. A plugged duct may also be caused by undergoing stress, being tired, or wearing a tight bra. Some women are also more likely to get plugged ducts than others.

If you feel a hard, tender lump in your breast:

- Nurse on the tender side first (it will hurt at first) when the baby is hungriest and sucks more strongly. This will help to empty the plugged breast.
- If you have a breast pump available, try to pump in between feedings as much as you can to help unplug the duct. This can be very helpful.
- Massage the breast with the lump, expressing extra milk and trying to unplug the breast.
- Between nursing times, put some moist heat to the breast. The best is to soak in a hot bath while massaging your breast and expressing milk. Hot showers and heating pads can also be helpful.
- Don't give up! With a plugged duct you may have to massage and use heat for several days until it clears.
- Sleep on your side instead of your back to help the milk flow down the ducts into your breasts.
- Make sure you get plenty of rest and relaxation. Let others help you out at home if they offer to help take care of the baby.
- When the plugged duct unclogs, you may feel a burning or pinching. This is normal.
- If a clogged duct also seems red, is very painful, or you have fever or flu-like symptoms (muscle aches, fatigue) talk to your doctor immediately. You could have a breast infection (mastitis) or a yeast infection.

How to prevent plugged ducts:

- Nurse frequently
- Empty each breast at each nursing. If your baby is unable, try and use a pump to empty them.
- Avoid tight or poorly fitting bras.