Comfort Measures for Postpartum Engorgement of the Breasts

Engorgement feels like a crisis, but fortunately, it is only a temporary problem. It usually begins by the third day after birth and resolves within a couple of days.

Suggestions

Apply warmth:

- Take a warm shower or tub bath, letting the milk flow down the drain.
- Wrap your breasts in warm wet washcloths (covered with plastic wrap to keep the warmth in, or use disposable diapers).
- Dip your breasts in a basin of warm water (again, allow the milk to flow out).

Massage:

- Gently massage your breasts and try to release some of the excess milk by squeezing with your hand.
- “Comb” your breasts with your hands.
- Roll a smooth cylinder from your underarm to nipple.
- Compress the areola with your fingers, to soften it so baby can latch on.
Questions?

Call if you have pain throughout the entire feeding, or if it is not getting better by the fifth day after birth. The UWMC Lactation staff are available to help at any time.

Lactation Services: 206-598-4628
9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Friday
9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday and Sunday

Labor and Delivery: 206-598-4616

Maternity and Infant Care Clinic: 206-598-4070

Feed your baby:

- Wake your baby for feeding every 2 hours if needed.

After nursing:

- Apply cool compresses (use gel-packs made for this purpose, a bag of frozen peas, wet washcloths chilled in the freezer, or cold raw cabbage leaves).
- Wear a bra if it fits well and feels good – don’t wear it if it digs into you and leaves red marks! If you have a stretch bra designed for athletic exercise, try that. Wear it to bed if the pain is keeping you awake at night.
- Wear a protective cover, such as breast shells, to let some of the milk leak out.
- Take a pain reliever like ibuprofen (i.e., Motrin® or Advil®) – this not only relieves pain but also reduces swelling. (While you’re still bleeding from your vagina, avoid aspirin because it can increase bleeding.)

If all else fails:

- Use a hospital-quality electric breast pump to remove the milk.
- If the engorgement is not relieved by these measures within 24 hours, call a lactation consultant, 206-598-4628.

See Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Newborn, pages 449 to 451.