

# Plugged Ducts



## *What is a plugged duct?*

That tender, lumpy area in your breast is probably a plugged duct. (There may also be a red spot on the skin over the lump.) This is a part of the breast that isn't emptying well when your baby feeds or when you pump.

## *What causes a plugged duct?*

A plugged duct can happen when your breast is not well drained. Perhaps you've missed some feedings or your baby is teething or having trouble latching so doesn't drain your breast well while feeding.

Plugged ducts can also be caused by some kind of outside pressure on your breast that prevents the milk from draining out of that duct. A bra that is too tight, pressure from a breast pump flange, a baby sling or even a car seatbelt are all things that can give you a plugged duct.

## *What's the treatment for a plugged duct?*

### ***“Cold, Massage, Rest & Empty the Breast”***

#### *Simple treatments to try right away:*

- Nurse often – every 2 hours or so. If unable to nurse, express milk frequently and thoroughly.
- Massage the blocked area before, during, or after feeding. (See below for instructions.)
- Use cold on the breasts to decrease inflammation – a bag of frozen peas or corn, a baggie with crushed ice, or a gel pack, wrapped in a towel. Cold should be used 15-20 minutes on, 40-45 minutes off.
- Immediately before feeding, apply heat to the affected area using a heating pad, rice sock or a diaper or washcloth soaked in warm water.
- While taking a shower, massage the plugged area toward the nipple.
- Start each feeding on the affected breast to take advantage of your baby's more vigorous sucking at the beginning of a feed.
- When latching your baby, position him so that his chin or nose is pointing toward the blocked area.
- If you're uncomfortable with the pain take some acetaminophen or ibuprofen (see below).

#### *Treatments for more persistent plugs:*

- Try castor oil packs: Apply castor oil to a warm, moist washcloth folded to the size of the affected area. Place plastic wrap on top, and then a heating pad on low on top of that. Do not place castor oil packs on the nipple or areola. Let it sit for 20 minutes before nursing or pumping. Then nurse or pump while massaging the area.
- “Dangle feed” your baby: Put your baby on his back and position yourself on your hands and knees and nurse from above (yes, like a cow). This takes advantage of gravity to remove the plug.
- Use a wand vibrator or an electric toothbrush against the affected spot to help break up

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- the plug – during feeding if your baby can stand the noise, or between feedings if not.
- Pump the affected breast to help remove the plug.
- Massage:
  - Lie on your back with cold compresses on your breasts for 5-10 minutes, then begin breast massage (either you or one of your support people can do the massage.) With the palm of the hand and starting from the areola, first gently massage away from the nipple and towards the outer edges of the breast.
  - Do this for several minutes, and the breast should begin to feel softer as excess fluids are moved out of the breast. Then repeat this motion towards your nipple, starting with short strokes from just outside the areola, then moving the starting point of the massage further and further away from the nipple.
  - You can alternate this massage with gently hand expressing milk from the nipple (can be caught in a washcloth, or in a cup/bottle if you would like to save it.)
  - For a visual and more ideas of how to do breast massage take a look at this video: <https://vimeo.com/65196007> (or Google “Maya Bolman breast massage”.) Breastfeed and/or pump immediately after the massage.

### *What pain medications are safe during breastfeeding?*

To help relieve your pain, it’s safe to take Acetaminophen (Tylenol) 1000 mg. every 6 hours (but no more than 4000 mg – or 8 extra-strength pills – per day) or Ibuprofen (Motrin) 600 mg. every 6 hours.

### *When should you start to feel better?*

If the lumpy area doesn’t go away after 2 – 4 days, or if you have any additional concerns, please call us at 919-933-3301 or toll free at 866-464-3295.

If you are experiencing a fever (101 degrees F or higher), flu-like symptoms (body aches and chills), and/or a generalized red area over one or both breasts, you may have mastitis (a breast infection). Call your midwife or OB care provider immediately. See next page for suggestions about helping prevent mastitis in the early stages.

Continue breastfeeding your baby frequently – there is no danger to your baby, and frequent milk removal is very important for helping treat mastitis.

### *How can you prevent another plugged duct?*

- Nurse often.
- Check for lumps while nursing and gently massage to empty those areas.
- If your baby isn’t emptying your breast well during feedings, express milk after feeding either manually or with a pump.
- Use moisture to remove any dried milk on your nipple.
- Avoid positions that put pressure on one spot for a long time.
- Use a nursing bra rather than a conventional bra that you push up to nurse.
- Be sure that your bra fits comfortably and that your clothes aren’t causing pressure anywhere on your breasts or under your arms.
- Avoid bunching up your sweater or nightgown under your arms when nursing
- Add daily lecithin to your diet: 3-4 1200 mg. capsules per day. Lecithin is thought to help

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- prevent plugged ducts by helping milk flow more easily.
- If you keep getting plugged ducts despite doing your best to prevent them, contact the lactation consultants here at the birth center for a more in-depth assessment.

### *Treating early signs of a breast infection (mastitis)*

If a mild case is caught early, mastitis can be treated with natural remedies. However, untreated mastitis can result in a more serious infection & breast abscess. If you are experiencing a fever (101 degrees F or higher), flu-like symptoms (body aches and chills), and/or a generalized red area over one or both breasts, call your midwife or OB care provider immediately.

Rest, fluids, wholesome meals, and frequent nursing of the affected breast is the best prevention and cure of mastitis.

If your plugged ducts are not improving and you are concerned your symptoms are getting worse, you may try the following steps to prevent further infection (along with the other steps you are taking to treat plugged ducts):

- Make an herbal infusion (tea) by covering & steeping dry herbal sitz blend (available in WBWC Boutique and other natural food/care stores). Soak a cloth & apply to affected area multiple times per day. Excess infusion can be stored in the refrigerator for repeated compresses. This will help reduce inflammation & treat infection.
- Apply a poultice of freshly grated raw potato to reddened area 2-3 times a day. Remove poultice when it becomes warm, usually after about 20 minutes. This will help reduce pain & inflammation.
- Take 1 teaspoon of Echinacea tincture every 2-4 hours. Continue 24 hours after all signs of illness have past. Echinacea is a gentle yet effective anti-infective herb.
- Eat lots of raw garlic! Mince a clove of garlic & place on a teaspoon of honey & enjoy often. Babies love the flavor of garlic through breastmilk. Garlic is a well-known anti-infective.

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