

Breast inflammation: “Plugged Ducts” and Early Mastitis

What is Mastitis?

Mastitis refers to different breast conditions that involve inflammation (swelling) of the breast such as “plugged ducts”, early mastitis (non-infectious), infectious mastitis and abscesses.

A ‘plugged duct’ is not really a ‘plug’. It is the narrowing of one duct, which can cause pain, swelling, and milk to back up.

Causes:

Inflammation/swelling causes narrowing of the ducts that carry milk through the breast. Inflammation, rather than an infection, is usually the reason for the symptoms below.

Symptoms:

A tender, hard lump, or a wedge-shaped area of swelling in the breast. You may also feel run down and have a fever. Early treatment is recommended to avoid general discomfort and complications such as an infection in your breast or a breast abscess.

Possible reasons may be:

- Oversupply of milk
- Pumping
- Nipple shield use
- Imbalance of normal bacteria in the breast

Breast pumps and nipple shields are sometimes medically indicated. See your healthcare provider or lactation consultant to ensure you have a plan.

Initial Treatment:

Early treatment can help prevent a breast infection. Current evidence recommends **BAIT: Breast Rest, Anti-inflammatory (NSAIDs), Ice, and Tylenol.**

Breast Rest:

- Continue to breastfeed by your baby’s feeding cues, starting on the healthy breast for the next few days until things feel better.
- If possible, breastfeed directly (instead of pumping or using a nipple shield).
- If you are only pumping (not feeding your baby directly at breast): pump enough for your baby, do not try to “empty” your breasts.

Ice:

- Apply ice/cold packs for 10-20 minutes every one to two hours while you are awake.
- Avoid too much heat. However, if a warm compress prior to breastfeeding or pumping is soothing, you can use it sparingly.

Anti-inflammatory (NSAIDs like ibuprofen) and pain relief medications (Tylenol):

- Take ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) every 6-8 hours or as directed by your provider.
- Take acetaminophen (Tylenol) every 6-8 hours to treat pain and fever, as directed by your provider.

What Else Can Help?

If you have breast inflammation often, consider:

Sunflower Lecithin:

- 2400 mg 3 times a day. Lecithin is a phospholipid which helps make milk fat less sticky.

Probiotics:

- These types of probiotics may help keep your breast healthy:
- Elactia (Everidis, St Louis Missouri) (L fermentum)
- Target b2 (Klaire Labs, Reno Nevada) (L fermentum)
- Solaray Women’s Mycrobioime (L fermentum and L salivarus)

Use Caution with Massage

- Avoid hard/deep massage and vibration on the breast. These will make the inflammation worse.
- Consider gentle massage specifically for breast inflammation (lymphatic breast massage): <https://lacted.org/videos/>.
- Hand expression: <https://vimeo.com/65196007>.

Nutrition and Rest

- Eat a healthy diet consisting of fresh vegetables, fruits, whole grains, spices, and omega 3 fatty acids.
- Inflammation usually happens when you are run down. Get as much rest and support as you can.
- Drink plenty of fluids if you have a fever.

Call your OB Provider’s office (415-353-2566) if your symptoms do not improve in 48 hours, you have a hard lump that remains on the breast (even if you feel better) after 48 hours, the redness on your skin spreads quickly across your breasts. (Note: it is normal to have a “wedge” of redness appear on the breast if you have a “plugged duct” or early mastitis; this alone is not a cause for concern).