

BREAST FULLNESS AND ENGORGEMENT

Breast fullness is a normal process after you give birth. It is normal for your breasts to feel full or overly full (engorgement) as you and your baby learn to breastfeed. Always make sure your baby feeds 8 or more times in 24 hours.

Breast Fullness

- Breasts feel firmer, larger, heavier and warmer when you begin to produce more milk.
- Usually begins on the second to the sixth day after giving birth.
- Your milk will flow easily.

Suggestions

- Keep your baby in close contact with you.
 - Place your baby skin-to-skin often throughout the day.
 - Watch your baby for feeding cues. Be sure that your baby feeds at least 8 times in 24 hours.
 - Take a warm shower. Have the water flow against your back rather than directly onto your breasts. Gently massage your breasts toward your nipples for a few minutes.
 - Try reverse pressure softening. Please see handout titled “Reverse Pressure Softening”.
 - Hand express or use a breast pump if your baby is having trouble latching on to the breast. This will soften the dark area around your nipple and help your baby to latch on.
 - Wear a well-fitting bra with no underwires. Do not bind your breasts.
 - Drink whenever you feel thirsty. There is no need to limit your fluids.
 - Discuss with your health care provider the use of over-the-counter medications to reduce pain and swelling.

If breast fullness is not managed, your breasts will become engorged. Breast engorgement is preventable.

Engorgement

- Breasts feel swollen, warm, red and painful. The surrounding skin may be tight and shiny. Your nipples may look flattened.
- Usually begins on the third to the fifth day after giving birth.
- Your milk will not flow easily.
- Once your milk starts to flow your breasts should feel more comfortable within 12-24 hours.

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Suggestions

- Lie on your back to elevate your breasts.
- Place cold cloths on your breasts after breastfeeding. Each cloth should be large enough to cover all of your breast. Keep the cold cloths on your breasts for 10-15 minutes. Remove the cold cloth for one hour. Repeat as necessary.
- Another option is to use plastic bags with crushed ice or frozen vegetables. Be sure to place a thin towel next to your skin and place the plastic bag on the towel. Keep the cold bag in place for 10-15 minutes. Remove the cold bag for one hour. Repeat as necessary.
- Some mothers prefer to use cold green cabbage leaves. Be sure the leaves are washed and dried. Apply the cold leaves to your breasts between feeds. You can hold them in place with your bra. Replace the leaves when they become limp and wilted. Repeat as necessary.
- Try reverse pressure softening. Please see handout titled “Reverse Pressure Softening”.
- Try expressing some milk until the area of the breast around the nipple begins to soften. Once your breasts start to feel softer, try latching your baby on.
- If your baby refuses to latch, then hand expression or pump your breasts. It is important to remove your milk from your breasts to establish a milk supply.
- Discuss with your health care provider the use of over-the-counter medications to reduce pain and swelling.

Your breasts should begin to soften and milk should begin to flow within 24 hours. If engorgement continues, call a health care provider who is skilled with helping breastfeeding mothers.

References

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- Smith, L. (2016). Postpartum Care. In Wambach, K. & Riordan, J.'s *Breastfeeding and Human Lactation*, 5th ed. Burlington, MA: Jones & Bartlett Learning.
- Walker, M. (2014). *Breastfeeding Management for the Clinician: Using the Evidence*, 3rd ed. Burlington, MA: Jones and Bartlett Learning. 501-508.

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Baby Friendly Initiative