

Plugged Duct

Breastfeeding can be very rewarding, but it can also be challenging. Thankfully, most challenges can be fixed. A common challenge for moms is a plugged duct, especially if she is having trouble with breastfeeding or milk expression (**removing milk by hand or with a pump**).

Plugged ducts or clogged milk ducts happen when breastmilk collects in a milk duct and forms a thick plug. This plug feels like a small lump if caught early, but can quickly affect other milk ducts, making the lump bigger. A plugged duct can happen for several reasons, like:

- a delayed or missed feeding or pumping session
- when your baby does not feed well
- trouble expressing breastmilk
- pressure applied to your breast for a long time

Here are some ideas to help you avoid plugged ducts and ways to help resolve them.

You may have a plugged duct if you are having any of these symptoms:

- A small or large area in your breast feels firm and does not soften with feeding or pumping
- You have an area in your breast that is tender or painful to touch
- An area where there is a hard lump or area that may be pink or red
- An area in your breast that feels warm to touch
- You may have a mild fever
- You have a decrease in milk supply

Prevention - How to Avoid Plugged Ducts

- **Don't wait too long between feeds or milk expression.**
Long breaks between feedings and expressions increase your risk of **engorgement** and having milk plugs form.
- **Make sure that your baby has a good latch.**
A good **latch** will allow a good milk transfer and keep milk moving to prevent milk ducts from becoming plugged. This also helps keep a good milk supply.

- **When pumping, use flanges that fit well.**
Flanges that fit poorly do not allow for a proper flow of milk when **pumping**. Your breasts should be soft after feeding and pumping.
- **Use different breastfeeding positions.**
Changing the baby's **feeding position** causes the milk flow in the milk ducts to change, which lowers the chances of getting plugged ducts.
- **Avoid engorgement.**
Keep your breasts soft by feeding your baby or by expressing milk often. Don't limit your baby's feeding or wait until your breasts feel full to feed. You always have milk available for baby. Also, feed for as long as baby wants.
Engorgement increases the risk of plugged duct forming and can decrease your milk supply.
- **Wear clothing that is not tight on your breasts.**
Clothes that are too tight on your breasts can limit milk flow and can lead to plugged milk ducts.

If you have a plugged duct, here are some tips that may help:

- Breastfeed or express milk more often. This will help resolve any issues with milk flow and lower the chances of the plugged duct growing. Remember to ensure that the baby is latched well and your breast will be softer after the feed. For moms who are **expressing milk with a breast pump**, check that your pump is working properly and that your flanges fit well.
- Before feeding the baby or using a breast pump, apply a warm towel to the entire breast for 10 minutes. Warmth help blood circulation, causing more milk to flow through the milk ducts. This helps break up milk plugs. If the plugged duct area is bigger than a dime or swollen, use cold packs instead. This will help with swelling and improve the milk flow to break up any milk plugs.
- Massage the breast in a downward motion towards the nipple. A massage can help milk flow and may soften the breast quicker. You can do this before or during feedings or while expressing milk.
- Have your baby breastfeed on the side with the plugged duct first. Your baby usually has a stronger suck at the start of a nursing session and this can help get rid of resolve plugged milk ducts.

It is important to continue to breastfeed or express milk when you have a plugged duct. A plugged duct can turn into mastitis or an abscess if not resolved.

Get breastfeeding help if...

- The plugged duct does not go away within 24 hours
- The plugged duct grows in size
- You develop flu-like symptoms (chills and body aches) as this may be a sign of **mastitis**
- Your whole breast becomes warm, swollen, or is tender
- Breastfeeding becomes or is painful
- You cannot get the baby to latch on well

Call your health care provider if...

- You get a temperature higher than 101°F
- You have flu-like symptoms for more than 24 hours or your symptoms worsen

Check out these other ADHS breastfeeding handouts for more helpful information[Sore Nipples](#)[Engorgement](#)[Low Milk Supply](#)[Mastitis](#)[Pumping Tips](#)[Choosing a Breast Pump](#)

Arizona WIC | 24-Hour Breastfeeding Hotline 1-800-833-4642

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