

CARING FOR SORE AND SWOLLEN BREASTS

ENGORGEMENT

It is normal for your breasts to feel larger and heavier a few days after giving birth. If your baby is breastfeeding* well, **this fullness will decrease after two to three weeks**. If your baby is not feeding well and milk is not being removed frequently and/or you had increased IV fluids during labour, this normal breast fullness can lead to engorgement.

*Note: The terms breast milk/breastfed/breastfeeding are widely used, but human milk/chestfed/chestfeeding can be used interchangeably. The terms are meant to be inclusive of all parents, caregivers and significant others.

NORMAL BREAST FULLNESS

Mild swelling caused by an increase in fluids and volume of milk in your breasts

- Occurs two to four days after delivery
- Breasts feel heavy, tender and warm
- Your nipples and areolas are soft, and your baby can latch well
- Swelling will improve on its own with effective feeding/milk removal during the day and night - at least eight times in 24 hours

ENGORGEMENT

Breasts are sore and hard; your skin might be shiny; swelling might also occur in your underarm (armpit) area

- You may have a low-grade fever
- Your hands and arms could feel numb or have a tingling sensation
- Breast and areolar swelling make it difficult for your baby to latch well
- It might be difficult for your baby to remove milk at the breast, and you may have difficulty hand expressing

ENSURE EFFECTIVE MILK REMOVAL

- Breastfeed at least 8 times in 24 hours, day and night, whenever your baby shows signs of hunger
- Offer one breast at a time, soften one side before offering the second. Listen for the swallows to decrease before switching your baby to the other breast
- Ensure that the latch is comfortable. If you are experiencing pain, or your baby is not swallowing well at the breast, get help!
- Hand express or pump your milk if your baby misses a feeding or is not effective at removing milk.
- Only express the amount of milk your baby needs; **pumping and/or removing extra milk your baby doesn't need can make the problem worse**
- Gentle compressions during breastfeeding or pumping may be helpful to increase flow of milk but use caution with swollen and sensitive breasts
- Try using gentle stroking instead of massaging
- Visit york.ca/Breastfeeding to learn about hand expression

PUBLIC HEALTH

1-800-361-5653

TTY: Dial 711

york.ca/Breastfeeding



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York Region

TIPS FOR MANAGING SWOLLEN BREASTS

Apply cold packs to decrease swelling

- Use cold compresses between feeds to help reduce pain and inflammation. Ice packs or frozen vegetables wrapped in towels can be applied for 20 minutes every hour or more often if comfortable

Do not apply prolonged heat

- While applying heat may feel soothing, it can worsen breast swelling
- For mild engorgement, indirect heat such as a shower may offer some relief and help get the milk flowing

Consider over-the-counter pain-relieving medications

- Medications such as acetaminophen and anti-inflammatories such as ibuprofen can help reduce pain and swelling – both medication types are safe with breastfeeding and/or offering human milk
- Take as directed and speak to your health care professional if you have concerns about these medications

USE YOUR HANDS

Reverse pressure softening may make it easier for your baby to latch by pressing some of the swelling back into the breast tissue and away from the nipple and areola.

- Press into the breast with your finger pads and hold for 30-60 seconds
- Move the placement of your hands and hold for another 30-60 seconds

Do not knead or massage the breast tissue as this can cause more inflammation.



Use fingertips of both hands to press on your areola



You can use one or both hands



You can also use the sides of your hands if your fingernails are long

Lymphatic massage is a technique you can perform yourself, that reduces swelling by assisting movement of fluid in your body. Use a light sweeping motion, being careful not to press deeply into the tissue. This helps lift the excess fluid where it can move away.

- Make 10 small circles at the base of your neck, just above your collarbone
- Make 10 small circles where your breast meets your underarm
- Sweep from your nipple toward your chest, collarbone and underarm



GET HELP

If you experience flu-like symptoms, develop a fever and/or notice increased pain or discoloration of your breasts, contact your health care professional as soon as possible.

Call Health Connection at **1-800-361-5653** or chat live at york.ca/NurseChat for breastfeeding information and advice.

York Region Public Health offers both in-person and virtual breastfeeding support.

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