



Mercy Health
Care first

Your important health information

Mastitis

Mastitis is swelling (and sometimes infection) of tissue within the breast. If you cannot manage your symptoms on your own, you should see a lactation consultant or your doctor.

Signs and symptoms

- One breast (or both) has red, painful, swollen, lumpy and hot areas.
- You may (or may not) feel very unwell, with shivers, aches and pains, headaches and a high temperature; it can feel like you have the flu.

Sometimes there is more than one reason why mastitis happens

- Swelling in the breast that makes it harder to get milk out.
- Baby not attached well to your breast and not removing milk well (painful latch)
- Making a lot more milk than your baby needs at the breast and your breasts are uncomfortably full
- Long gaps between feeds/expressions or missed feeds
- Giving baby a bottle and not expressing
- Bra or pump flange too tight and pressing into your breast
- Suddenly stopping breastfeeding or expressing
- Using too much force when massaging your breasts – no greater pressure than gentle stroking (like “stroking a cat”)
- Pump flange too small, too large or pump settings too strong.

Treatment/what to do

- Continue breastfeeding/expressing regularly and evenly between both breasts, feeding baby to appetite. It is safe to continue breastfeeding even with mastitis.
- Make sure your baby is well latched to your breasts and continue to offer the sore breast if it's not too painful. If you are concerned about attachment, speak with your midwife or lactation consultant.
- You should not aim to empty the affected breast.
- Apply a cool pack to the sore area before and/or after breastfeeding or expressing. This can help reduce pain and swelling, if this feels good to you.
- A warm shower or warm compress before feeding/expressing can help milk to flow, if this feels good to you.
- If your baby isn't feeding well, has not taken much milk, or your breasts are not softening, try to express some milk by hand and/or pump.
- Allow your breast to rest between feeding/expressing.

- Sometimes your breast may be too swollen and hard for milk to flow well during a breastfeed or when expressing. This should improve as the swelling improves.
- Gently stroking the breast toward the armpit can help to reduce the excess fluid.
- Rest and sleep as much as possible, keep eating normally and drink plenty of fluids.
- Wear a supportive, but not tight maternity bra that doesn't leave marks on your skin.
- Medicines such as paracetamol (Panadol or Panamax) and/or ibuprofen (Nurofen/Advil) help with the swelling and pain
- If you have a high temperature, chills, aches and pains you should see a Doctor. If you have a red area on the breast for more than 24 hours, you should see a doctor.
- You may be prescribed you antibiotics.
- It is safe to keep breastfeeding and/or expressing while taking antibiotics prescribed for mastitis.
- If you have mastitis more than once, talk with your lactation consultant about how to prevent this.

Although rare, a breast abscess can form when mastitis is not properly treated. If an abscess does form, minor procedures may be required.

If you wish to stop breastfeeding or expressing (wean), wait until the mastitis is cleared. For help with weaning, speak with your midwife or lactation consultant.

Further Information

If you have any questions about this information, please contact:

Mercy Hospital for Women

Breastfeeding Support Service

Phone: 03 8458 4677

Pharmacy Department:

Phone: 03 8458 4666

Werribee Mercy Hospital

Breastfeeding Support Service

Phone: 03 8754 3407

Pharmacy Department:

Phone: 03 8754 3541

Other services

Australian Breastfeeding Association Helpline Phone: 1 800 686 268

Maternal & Child Health Line

Phone: 13 22 29

Private Lactation Consultants

www.lcanz.org.au

Acknowledgements

Breastfeeding Support Services MHVL

Date produced: April 2020

Date of last review: April 2023

Date for review: April 2026