Intermountain® Healthcare

Breastfeeding: *Using a Nipple Shield*

What is a nipple shield?

A nipple shield is a nipple made of thin, clear silicone. It is worn over a woman's nipple and areola during breastfeeding.

Nipple shields should only be used when they're specifically recommended by a lactation consultant or other healthcare provider. Most of the time, nipple shields are used temporarily. In using a shield, the goal is to help a baby latch onto the breast correctly — and later, to help the baby breastfeed well without a shield.

When are shields recommended?

After a careful evaluation, a lactation consultant or other provider may recommend using a nipple shield in these situations:

- Your baby is preterm or extremely small. He tires easily at the breast and has trouble maintaining a good latch throughout the feeding.
- Your nipples are flat or inverted (they go in, rather than stick out) and your baby has trouble drawing your nipple into his mouth.
- Your baby is used to feeding from bottles, and now has trouble getting a good latch on your nipples during breastfeeding.

Will I always need to use a shield to breastfeed?

Most of the time a shield is used for a few days or weeks, then gradually discontinued. The back page of this handout gives tips for making the transition to breastfeeding without a nipple shield.

How do I use a nipple shield?

Follow these steps:

- **Moisten the rim of the nipple shield with a few drops of water or milk.** This helps the shield stay put on your breast.
- **Turn the nipple shield almost all the way inside out,** so that the rim of the shield looks like the brim of a hat. (If you're using a shield with a cut-away section along part of the edge — like the one shown above right — position the shield so that the cut-away part will go where the baby's nose will be. This way, your baby's nose can directly touch your breast.)
- **Center the tip of the shield over your nipple, then slowly roll the edges down over the areola.**
- **Bring your baby to your breast using the latch-on techniques discussed in Intermountain's *A Guide to Breastfeeding* booklet.** When your baby's mouth is wide open, pull his bottom into your side and bring him toward your breast with his upper lip aiming for the nipple and his bottom lip aimed as far away from the base of the nipple as possible. (Your nipple should be pointing toward the roof of his mouth as you bring him to your breast.)
- **If your baby won't take or keep the shield in his mouth, pump for several minutes first, then rub some of your milk on the outside of the shield.**
- **After each breastfeeding session, wash the shield with warm sudsy water.** Let it air dry.

How will I know if my baby is getting enough milk?

To be sure your baby is getting enough breast milk while using the shield, **your baby's doctor must check your baby's weight often**. Be sure the doctor knows that you're using a nipple shield to breastfeed, and keep all appointments with your baby's doctor.

At home, check your baby's milk intake by counting the number of wet and dirty diapers your baby makes in a day. More detail on these guidelines appears in *A Guide to Breastfeeding:*

- On the third day of life, your baby should have at least 3 bowel movements in a 24-hour period.
- On the fourth day of life, your baby should have at least 4 mustard-yellow bowel movements and at least 4 wet diapers in a 24-hour period.
- After the fourth day of life, your baby should have 6 or more wet diapers each day. Until she's 8 weeks old, she should also have about 4 messy diapers each day. After 8 weeks, she may continue to have several messy diapers each day, or she may go several days without one.

Remember to breastfeed your baby often — every 2 or 3 hours. This adds up to 8 to 12 breastfeeding sessions in every 24-hour period.

For help with breastfeeding, call...

Lactation consultants. Call your birthing hospital and ask if there's an outpatient lactation clinic in your area. (There might be one at the hospital itself.) Arrange to meet a lactation consultant for expert, hands-on help with breastfeeding.

Phone number: _____

La Leche League. This organization provides support, encouragement, and information to breastfeeding moms.

Utah chapter phone number: (801) 264 - LOVE

Your baby's doctor (pediatrician).

Phone number : _____

How can I transition to breastfeeding without a nipple shield?

The transition away from use of nipple shield should be a gradual process in most cases. As long as your baby is gaining weight, there's no need to rush. You and your baby can take your time getting used to breastfeeding without a shield. Here are some tips:

- **Try nursing without the shield at the earlier breastfeeding sessions of the day, or whenever your baby is calm.** Evening and nighttime sessions — when you and baby may both be more tired — are usually not the best time for a challenge.
- **If your baby becomes very frustrated when trying to breastfeed without the nipple shield, don't force it.** Continue to use the shield as needed.
- **Before you breastfeed, pump for several minutes.** This can help lengthen your nipple and trigger milk let-down. Your baby may have an easier time getting started.
- **Begin each session with the nipple shield in place.** After a few minutes — and while your baby is still hungry — remove the shield and try to get your baby to latch directly onto your breast. Then, with the following feedings, try to remove the shield earlier in the session.
- **Hold your baby skin-to-skin often.** This soothes and comforts both of you and helps your baby get used to the feel of your breast without the shield.

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