Intermountain® Healthcare

# Breastfeeding: *Easing Sore Nipples*

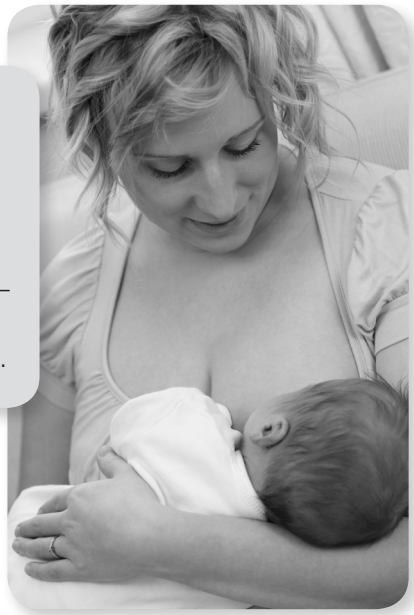
Breastfeeding shouldn't be painful. Nevertheless, sore nipples are a problem for many women, especially in the first few weeks of breastfeeding. Fortunately, this problem can almost always be solved. This handout gives you some ideas to try.

## For mild soreness

For mildly sore nipples, try these ideas first:

- **Be aware of your baby's latch** (how your baby grasps your nipple in his mouth). If you feel pinching or pain in your nipple when your baby latches on (not just a strong tug), it's possible that your baby isn't latching on correctly. So as you put your baby to your breast, wait until his mouth is wide open before letting him latch on. You want your baby to grasp onto your areola — not just your nipple — with a wide open mouth. If you don't see this, remove your baby from your breast and try again.
- **When you take your baby from your breast, always break the suction first** by gently inserting your finger into the corner of his mouth. Do this every time you remove him from your breast.
- **Try different nursing positions.** A different position may improve your baby's latch and move pressure off the sorest areas of your nipples. See pages 8 and 9 of your *Living and Learning Guide to Breastfeeding* booklet for positioning options.
- **Keep breastfeeding about every 2 to 3 hours** to prevent your breasts from becoming overly full. Overly full breasts can make it difficult for your baby to latch on correctly. If your breasts do become too full, express (pump or squeeze out) some milk before breastfeeding.
- **Don't let your baby chew on your nipple or go to sleep holding your nipple in his mouth.**

It's normal to feel a tug when your baby latches on and begins to nurse. However, breastfeeding shouldn't be painful. If it is, don't try to ignore it — take the steps described here to ease the soreness.



- **After each feeding, express a few drops of your milk and massage it gently onto your nipples.** Breast milk is soothing to your delicate skin. Be sure to let the nipples air dry before covering them.
- **Keep your nipples clean.** Wash with warm water only — don't use soap on your nipples. Let your nipples dry completely before covering them.
- **To help your nipples heal and keep breast pads from sticking to them, rub a small amount of pure lanolin onto your nipples.** Make sure that the lanolin you use is approved for breastfeeding. You can find this where you buy other breastfeeding supplies.
- **If you're using a breast pump, make sure your nipples aren't rubbing against the inside of the flanges when you pump.** (The flange is the funnel-like part that fits over your breast.) You may need a larger-size flange. These are available at lactation supply stores, online, and from lactation consultants.

## For ongoing problems or severe soreness

If your discomfort lasts more than two days or becomes worse — and especially if your nipple is cracked, scabbed, or bleeding — contact a lactation consultant or another healthcare provider. They can evaluate the reason for the problem and arrange treatment and extra support. They may also recommend one or more of the treatments described below.

### Saline soaks

If the skin isn't broken, try soaking your nipples in a mild salt solution (saline). Here's what to do:

1. Mix 1 teaspoon table salt with 2 cups warm water.
2. Dip two 2 x 2 gauze pads in the salt solution and remove them without wringing all of the salt solution from the gauze.
3. Place the wet gauze pads on your nipples, molding them to cover all of the sore areas.
4. Keep the pads on for 5 to 10 minutes, then remove them and blot your nipples dry. (You don't need to rinse off your nipples.) You can then apply lanolin, a gel pad, or vegetable/olive oil for extra soothing.

Repeat the steps above 3 to 4 times a day after breastfeeding.

**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 : _____

### Gel pads

As you may know, "regular" cotton breast pads are tucked into your bra cups to help absorb any leaking milk between feedings. For very sore nipples, however, you may want to use gel pads instead. Here are the basics about this helpful product:

- Gel pads are worn in your bra and help soothe and protect your nipples. And like regular breast pads, gel pads absorb leaking milk.
- Gel pads are easy to clean — just rinse with cool tap water between feedings. Generally, you can use gel pads for 5 to 7 days before you need to replace them with a new set.
- Gel pads feel cool against your skin — and if you put the pads in the refrigerator, they give even more cooling relief to sore nipples. However, don't also use lanolin or other ointments on your breasts while using the gel pads.
- There are several different brands of gel pads (ComfortGel, Soothies, HydroGel, and more). You may find gel pads for sale at your local drugstore or larger grocery store. Otherwise, look for them online or at a specialty lactation store. (A lactation consultant can also tell you where to buy gel pads.)

### Prescription ointment

If you have ongoing pain and damaged nipple skin (cracked, scabbed, or bleeding) — and if infection is suspected — your doctor may prescribe an ointment such as Jack Newman MD's All Purpose Nipple Ointment.

This ointment is specially mixed by the pharmacist, and contains an antibiotic, an antifungal agent, and a steroid. The antibiotic and antifungal ingredients help fight bacterial or yeast infections, which are common when the skin is broken. The steroid treats inflammation and eases the pain of inflamed skin.

A few tips for using this ointment:

- Apply a small amount of ointment to nipples after each feeding.
- Don't wash or wipe off the ointment.
- Use the ointment for 7 to 10 days. Call your lactation consultant or doctor if your pain continues after this time.

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