

Stopping milk production (Lactation suppression)



The reduction and eventual stopping of breast milk production after childbirth is known as the suppression of lactation. For whatever reason you have decided to stop your breasts making milk it is very important that you do it gradually over a period of time. Sudden suppression of breast milk supply can lead to problems such as engorgement, mastitis, and emotional upsets (even depression) for some women.

Strategies for suppressing

- Support your breasts by wearing a firm bra both day and night, to help keep you comfortable
- Use breast pads to soak up any leaking milk. Change them frequently as they become wet to avoid nipple or breast infection
- If suppressing immediately following birth avoid stimulating the breasts, but if the breasts become very full and painful express a little milk occasionally for comfort
- If lactation is established it is best to reduce

breast milk production over a minimum of a week or preferably longer. Eliminating one expression or feed a day, every two or three days

- Relieve pain and swelling by putting cold compresses in your bra, or use cold compresses (e.g. ice pack) after a shower or bath
- Clean, cold cabbage leaves worn inside the bra can also be soothing. Change the leaves when they become warm and limp. Continue using them until your breasts stop feeling overfull
- Handle your breasts very gently as they can bruise easily
- Whenever your breasts feel too full, express only enough to make you comfortable
- Mild medications, such as paracetamol and ibuprofen, may help relieve pain
- Drink when you are thirsty. Cutting down fluids will not help reduce your milk supply
- For the first few days you may be uncomfortable lying in bed because your breasts are so full. Support your breasts with pillows. When lying on your front, place a pillow under your hips and stomach to ease the pressure on your breasts. Place a soft towel under your breasts to soak up any leaking milk.

Things to watch for

Engorgement (painful, overfull breasts)

If your breasts become engorged and the above suggestions do not ease your discomfort, it may help to express all the milk in the breasts, just

once, with an electric breast pump. This can relieve the pressure within your breasts, and you may be able to prevent it building up to that point again.

Blocked ducts and mastitis

Sometimes a blocked milk duct can form a painful lump in your breast. If the blockage remains, milk can be forced into the breast tissue, which becomes inflamed. The lump may look swollen and red, be tender and hot to touch and you may feel very unwell with “flu-like” symptoms. This is called mastitis and can come on very quickly. You will need to express to empty your breasts and clear the blockage.

To treat blocked ducts and mastitis:

- Apply a warm pack to the affected area for just a few minutes. Then express your milk
- Continue to breastfeed or express with blocked ducts or mastitis, your breast milk is safe for baby
- Keep the breast as empty as possible by expressing every few hours. You can go back to reducing your supply once the mastitis has healed
- While expressing, massage gently in a downward motion from the top of your breast towards the nipple. Lubricate your fingers with oil. Supporting your breast with one hand as you massage, will help reduce the pain from the breast dragging under its own weight
- A good place to hand express is under the shower or in a deep warm bath, if able, allowing the water to support your breast
- Between expressing sessions apply a well-wrapped cold pack to your breast to reduce swelling and relieve pain. Cold cabbage leaves can also help
- Consult your doctor straight away if you feel unwell, have a fever, or if you cannot clear a blocked duct within 12 hours. You may need antibiotics. Your breast milk is safe for baby if you start antibiotics

- An anti-inflammatory painkiller will help with pain relief. Discuss with your pharmacist or doctor.

How long before the milk goes away?

This depends on a few things. These include:

- How much milk you were making or how long you were breastfeeding
- How much milk is taken from the breast through expressing or leakage
- How much your nipples are stimulated or touched
- Becoming pregnant again.

There are some prescribed drugs that have been used to suppress lactation. These medications are not very effective and have serious side effects. Talk over the pros and cons of using lactation suppression drugs with your doctor before making a decision about whether they are necessary in your case.

Every mother will have a slightly different experience. You may be over the worst of it in a few days or it may take weeks for your milk to go away completely. You may notice milk stains on your bra or that you leak during or after a warm shower. You may even feel the let-down months or even years after suppressing.

This fact sheet is a general information sheet. For further advice please speak with a nurse, midwife or lactation consultant.



This publication has been reviewed and approved by Townsville HHS health consumers.



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