
Breast Infection (Mastitis)

Mastitis begins as inflammation in the breast tissue. If it is not treated quickly it can develop into an infection. It starts suddenly and usually occurs in one breast only. Call your health care provider if you have signs and symptoms of mastitis.

Signs may include:

- Pain, redness and heat on your breast.
- Red streaking on your breast.
- Fever and flu-like symptoms.
- Feeling achy and run down.
- Feeling nauseated.

Causes of Mastitis

Mastitis can have a number of causes:

- You have damaged or cracked nipples. Germs can enter into the breast tissue.
- Your baby is not latching or sucking well. She may not remove enough milk from your breast.
- Your baby suddenly feeds much less than usual. This can lead to a backup of milk in one or both of your breasts.
- Your baby takes only one breast for a few feeds after usually taking both.
- You are wearing a bra or baby carrier that is too tight.
- You are putting pressure from a purse or something else across an area of your breast.
- You are feeling tired, stressed or run-down.
- If you have a blocked duct that you can't clear in a day or two and you have some of the signs and symptoms mentioned above, call your health care provider.



For more information on blocked ducts see the fact sheet *Block Ducts* that accompanies this resource at http://en.beststart.org/for_parents/do-you-have-baby-0-12-months.

Breastfeeding During Mastitis

Continue to breastfeed your baby whenever he shows feeding cues if you have mastitis. Your antibodies will protect your baby from infection.

What you can do:

- Breastfeed frequently to keep your milk moving. If your breast is too painful then hand express and/or pump your breastmilk as often as your baby feeds or whenever your breast feels uncomfortable or full. Your breast milk, even when you have mastitis, will not harm your baby.
- Before breastfeeding or expressing, apply a warm moist compress to the affected area. You can also take a warm bath or shower. Gently massage the affected area while applying heat to promote milk removal.
- If it is not too painful, offer the sore breast to your baby first. If it is too painful, offer the unaffected breast first, then switch to the sore breast once your baby's suck becomes more gentle. Try different breastfeeding positions to have your baby remove as much milk as possible from the sore breast.
- Drink whenever you feel thirsty and eat healthy snacks and meals according to Canada's Food Guide.
- Get plenty of rest.
- If possible, ask friends or family members to help with household tasks.

Your health care provider may prescribe a pain reliever and an antibiotic. It is important to follow your health care provider's instructions and to take all your medication even if you start to feel better. Most medications given for mastitis are safe to take while breastfeeding. If the medication is unsafe, talk to your health care provider and see if an alternative medication can be taken. If you have questions about the safety of your medications, you can call Motherisk at 1-877-439-2744 or visit www.motherisk.org.

