

Blocked Ducts

A blocked duct means there is a blockage in a milk duct. The duct cannot allow the milk from one area of the breast to flow towards the nipple. You may feel a lump or swelling in one area of your breast. The area may:

- Feel tender or painful.
- Look red.
- Feel warmer than the rest of your skin.

Sometimes milk producing cells in the breasts feel like lumps. This is normal. The lump from a blocked duct is different since you feel that the lump does not go away easily with breastfeeding.

It usually affects only one breast and one area of your breast. It may start off without pain, but if lump does go away it may become painful. The blockage needs to be cleared or it may cause you to develop a breast infection called mastitis.



Causes of a blocked duct

A blocked duct can have a number of causes.

- Your baby is not latching well or sucking well. She may not remove enough milk from your breast.
- Your baby is suddenly feeding much less than usual. It can lead to a backup of milk in one or both of your breasts.
- Your baby is taking only one breast for a few feeds after usually taking both.
- You have been wearing a bra or baby carrier that is too tight.
- You have been wearing a purse or something else across an area of your breast.
- You are feeling tired, stressed or run-down.
- You tend to sleep more on one side.

What you can do

- Begin all feedings on the breast with the blocked duct until the lump and the pain are gone. Your baby will usually suck stronger on the first breast as she is hungry. Her stronger suck is more likely to clear the blockage.
- Try breastfeeding your baby in different positions to help remove milk from all areas of your breast.
- Gently, but firmly, massage the breast just above the lump and towards the nipple before breastfeeding and while breastfeeding.
- Apply a moist, warm compress to the area of your breast where the lump is.
- Take a warm shower or bath and massage the breast to help the flow of milk.
- The blockage may be in your nipple. Look for any dried milk on the nipple and soak it off with plain water.
- Remove your bra if it feels too tight.
- Ask other family members to help with household tasks and older children.
- Try to rest more.

If you have a fever, chills or achiness it is important to talk to someone who has experience helping breastfeeding mothers. The *Bilingual Online Ontario Breastfeeding Services directory* at www.ontariobreastfeeds.ca can help you connect and get help and support from peers, professionals and experts. You may have a breast infection called mastitis. For more information see the fact sheet about mastitis that complement the *Breastfeeding Matters* booklet at http://en.beststart.org/for_parents/do-you-have-baby-0-12-months.