

Breast Infection (Mastitis)

What is it?

Mastitis begins as an inflammation in the breast tissue. If it is not treated it may develop into an infection. It starts suddenly and usually occurs in one breast only. Signs may include:

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

Causes of Mastitis

- Poor removal of milk from the breasts.
- Missed feeds.
- Blocked duct.
- Tight bra, baby carrier or pressure from a purse strap.
- Stress and fatigue.

Breastfeeding During Mastitis

Continue to breastfeed your baby if you have mastitis. Your antibodies will protect your baby from infection. You may be thinking about weaning your baby, but the breast engorgement which follows sudden weaning makes the infection worse and could lead to an abscess.

What you can do

- Breastfeed frequently; every 2 hours or more often. Your milk will not harm your baby and removing milk from your breast regularly will help heal the mastitis.
- Before a feed, apply warm wet compresses to the affected area, or 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 plenty of fluids and rest. If possible, ask a friend or family member help care for you, your baby and your family until you feel better.
- Contact your health care provider right away. You may require treatment with a pain reliever and an antibiotic. There are many medications that are safe during breastfeeding. To find out about which medications are safe go to the Motherisk website at www.motherisk.org or call 1-877-439-2744.

