

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

Blocked ducts and mastitis when breastfeeding

Blocked ducts or mastitis can be very unpleasant conditions when breastfeeding, and often lead to supplementing your feeding or stopping completely. This leaflet is a guide to the symptoms, remedies and seeking treatment when needed.

Blocked ducts

A blocked duct occurs when milk is unable to flow through the breast easily. You may notice redness, or feel a tender spot or sore lump. Your breasts may also feel full and tender (also known as 'engorged'). Any engorgement or blocked ducts need to be treated promptly to avoid this developing into severe inflammation, or even an infection.

Mastitis

Mastitis (Inflammation of the breast) happens when a blocked duct doesn't clear and causes localised swelling and inflammation. It is also possible for the breast to become infected. If you have mastitis, you may feel ill with a fever or flu-like symptoms. If you have an infection as well, such symptoms will probably be worse.

Causes

A blocked duct leading to mastitis is often caused by any situation that affects the flow of milk in your breast, including:

- When your baby is not well attached and is not breastfeeding effectively.
- Missed, shortened or irregular feeds.
- Giving bottles or over-using a soother/dummy.
- Anything which places pressure on the breast, such as a tight bra or clothing, seat belt, a bag strap or even lying on your front.
- Holding or pressing on the breast during a feed.

Although you may not feel like it, putting your baby to the breast and continuing your breastfeeding is usually the best solution for treating a blocked duct. Stopping breastfeeding is likely to make the problem worse.

If you:

- See red patches on your breast.
- Feel a hard sore lump in your breast.
- Feel achy and run down.
- Feel feverish with a temperature less than 38°C.

Then you must take prompt action to improve milk flow:

- **Apply moist heat (e.g. a warm flannel)** before feeds to promote milk flow. Between feeds apply a cold compress for up to 20 minutes at a time.
- **Breastfeed your baby** at least 8-12 times each 24 hours (including night time), especially from the affected breast. Encourage your baby to breastfeed enough to leave your breast feeling soft and comfortable.
- **Ensure your baby is well attached** at the breast when they feed so that they drain the breast effectively.

If you are not sure about your baby's latch contact the feeding team for support.

- **Massage gently** if it is not too painful to do so. Start over, or behind the tender spot with your palm or fingers in a circular motion to help clear the blockage.
- **Consider taking a medication** such as ibuprofen to help reduce inflammation. Ibuprofen is compatible with breastfeeding.
- **Rest.** A blocked duct can be a sign that you are doing too much. Make sure you rest and ask family and friends to support you where possible.

If you:

- Don't feel better or see results in 8 hours.
- Continue to feel feverish or if your temperature suddenly increases to above 38°C.
- See pus or blood in your milk.
- See red streaks on your breast from the areola to underarm, or your breast becomes red, hot and swollen.
- Have chills and continue to feel worse.

You must:

- ✓ Call your doctor as you may need antibiotics.
- ✓ Take the full 10-14 days course of prescribed medication.
- ✓ Rest and drink plenty of fluids.

It is important to keep feeding - your milk is not infected and your baby will not be harmed by drinking it.

Prevention is better than cure.

To help avoid future problems:

- Breastfeed your baby frequently, avoiding long periods between feeds, day and night. Keeping your baby in the same room as you can make night feeds easier.
- Treat any engorgement promptly and check that all areas of your breast feel soft and comfortable after feeds.

- If any area of your breast is hard and uncomfortable, gently massage as you breastfeed.
- Take extra care of yourself or consider expressing when there are changes in routine which may cause longer gaps between feeds - such as holidays, special occasions or family events.

Contact details:

- **Infant Feeding Team** - 01623 676170
- **Natalie Boxall, Infant Feeding Midwife** - 01623 622515, extension 6575
- **Midwives Advice Line** – 01623 676170
- **Out of Hours Midwives** – 01623 655722
- **Out of Hours GP** – 111.

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

King's Mill Hospital: 01623 672222

Newark Hospital: 01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net.

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