

# Mastitis: Inflammation of the Breast

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*The goal of our education materials is to provide medically accurate information that is inclusive of all parents and families. We invite you to have a conversation with your provider about the vocabulary and language that is most comfortable for you.*

## What is mastitis?

**Mastitis** is a general term for inflammation of the breast. A breast with mastitis has a painful, tender area of redness, often with swelling. Sometimes people with mastitis may also have fever, chills, headache, body aches, and fatigue.

Mastitis usually happens when milk has not been removed from an area of the breast at the usual time. The milk-producing tissue becomes too full, causing a patch of swelling and redness. Sometimes the area can become infected, and we will need to treat it with antibiotic medications.

## What do I do if I have mastitis?

Most cases of mastitis do not require treatment with antibiotics. Many times, you can relieve your symptoms with some care at home. To decrease the inflammation in your breast:

- Feed your baby on demand (whenever they are hungry) or pump on your usual schedule.
  - Don't try to pump more often or remove more milk than your baby needs.
- Help with lymph fluid movement in your breast (avoiding extra fluid build-up) by doing **gentle lymphatic massage**. Gentle lymphatic massage helps your body get rid of swelling. You can do the massage using your hands (no special devices are needed).

- Scan the QR code or click on the link to see an instructional video about massage to help with lymphatic drainage.

**Lymphatic Massage for the Breast During  
Pregnancy and Lactation (IABLE):**  
[youtube.com/watch?v=-0Uwx7L47cg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-0Uwx7L47cg)



- **Avoid deep massage or squeezing** of the breast tissue. This may damage your breast tissue, make your symptoms worse, and cause other issues like poor milk drainage or fluid buildup (such as milk cysts or abscesses).
- Wear a bra with good breast support.
- Use ice packs or cold compresses on the breast to help reduce pain and swelling.
- Check with your healthcare provider about whether you can take anti-inflammatory and pain-relieving medications such as ibuprofen (Motrin®) or acetaminophen (Tylenol®). Ask them what dose is safe for you to take.
- Avoid using skin products such as saline soaks, castor oil, and other substances. These can irritate your skin and they will not help with breast inflammation.
- Avoid using nipple shields.

### **Is my milk safe to feed to my baby if I have mastitis?**

Breastfeeding (chestfeeding) and breast milk are safe for your baby, even when you have mastitis and when you are taking antibiotics.

### **How can I prevent mastitis?**

- Avoid pumping more milk than your baby needs. This extra pumping will raise your milk production and increase the risk of breast swelling and redness.

- Keep a regular routine of milk removal by nursing or pumping around the same times each day.
- If you are pumping, keep your pump parts clean. Pump parts that are not cleaned after each use can cause breast infections.
- Avoid using nipple shields, because it's usually harder to remove milk from the breast with these in place.

### **What do I do if I develop an abscess or a milk cyst?**

Abscesses and milk cysts often happen when there is too much milk production, or **hyperlactation**.

- An **abscess** is a buildup of pus, or infected fluid. If you develop an abscess in your breast, your healthcare provider will need to drain it.
- A **milk cyst**, or galactocele, is a buildup of milk in an area of the breast. Small milk cysts may clear up on their own without needing to be drained.

### **When should I call my healthcare provider?**

If your symptoms are not getting better within 24 hours, or you feel that you are getting worse very quickly, you may have an infection and need treatment with antibiotics.

**Please contact your healthcare provider immediately if you have any of these symptoms:**

- Your symptoms are mild but they haven't gotten better within 24 hours
- A fever higher than 100.4° F (38° C)
- Faintness, dizziness, weakness, racing heart (fast heartbeat), vomiting, or headache
- Blood or pus in your milk, or you think you may have an abscess

If your baby was born within the past 6 weeks, you can call Birth Center Triage at (734) 764-8134.

For general breastfeeding (chestfeeding) questions, please call the **Lactation Help Line** at (844) 200-8894. We will ask you to leave a message, and a lactation consultant will return your call within 24 hours.

For more information, visit the Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine's information on mastitis: [www.bfmed.org/parent-handouts](http://www.bfmed.org/parent-handouts)

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