

Blocked Ducts

A blocked duct means there is a blockage in a milk duct. Milk cannot flow past the blockage towards the nipple openings. You may feel a lump or swelling in the area of the blockage. This 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 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 the lump does not go away, it may become painful. The blockage needs to be cleared or it may cause a breast infection called mastitis.



Causes of a blocked duct:

- Your baby is not latching well or sucking well. Your baby may not remove enough milk from your breast.
- Your baby is suddenly feeding much less than usual. This can lead to a backup of milk in one or both of your breasts.
- Your baby is feeding from only one breast after usually feeding from both breasts.
- You have been wearing a bra that is too tight.
- You have been using a baby carrier, purse, or other item that crosses over 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 when most hungry. The stronger suck is more likely to help clear the blockage.
- Gently, but firmly, massage the breast just above the lump and towards the nipple before breastfeeding and while breastfeeding.
- Position your baby at the breast with their nose pointing to the blocked duct on your breast. This will help drain your breast in the affected area.
- Apply a warm compress to the area of your breast where the lump is.
- Take a warm shower or bath and gently massage the breast above the firm area 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. Try to avoid putting things that are tight against your breast.
- Try breastfeeding your baby in different positions to help remove milk from all areas of your breast.
- Ask other family members to help with household tasks and older children.
- Try to rest more.

If you have a fever, chills or body aches, you may have a breast infection called mastitis. Call your health care provider or *Telehealth Ontario 24/7 Breastfeeding Supports* at 1-866-797-0000. For more information see the fact sheet *Breast Infection (Mastitis)* that complements the *Breastfeeding Matters* booklet at http://en.beststart.org/for_parents/do-you-have-baby-0-12-months.

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.