

Mastitis

What is it?

What can I do about it?



The Academy of Breastfeeding medicine defines mastitis as "a tender, hot, swollen, wedge-shaped area of breast associated with fever of 38.5°C [101.3°F] or greater, chills, flu-like aching and systemic illness." Mastitis is any inflammation of the breast, whether or not the mother has a fever or whether or not she has a bacterial infection¹. Typically a mother will feel run down, flu-like symptoms accompanied by increased tenderness/redness of usually one breast (see example pictured above). If the soreness includes a lump in the breast without a fever the nursing mother is most likely experiencing a plugged duct and not mastitis. In *Breastfeeding: A Guide for the Medical Profession*, differentiating between an episode of mastitis or a plugged duct can be evaluated by the following symptoms:

Mastitis/Breast Infection: Comes on suddenly, is localized and includes a red, hot, swollen area of the breast as well as intense, localized pain. The nursing mother will feel as though she has the flu often with a temperature of 101°F or higher.

Plugged Duct: Comes on gradually and may shift in location. The nursing mother feels little or no warmth in the area and the pain is mild and localized. In general the mother feels well, but is experiencing localized discomfort.

Plugged ducts can be treated at home while mastitis sometimes (but not always) requires a visit to your doctor for antibiotics (make sure to complete the entire dose to prevent a relapse). Be on the look-out for signs of bacterial infection including: cracked nipple with obvious infection, pus and blood in your milk, red streaks from the site of the

infection and back into the breast and sudden, severe symptoms with no evidenced cause¹.

The main causes of mastitis include¹:

Poor latch or ineffective suck If a mom is sore it is hard to breastfeed, but postponing feedings will only make you more susceptible to breast infection as you breast gets overfull of milk. If your baby is properly latched on your nipple will not be sore. If you are experiencing sore nipples there are many remedies for this. Correct latch is the best and most permanent remedy. For nipple soreness you can try Ameda's Cool Gels, Lansinoh Cream or Earth Mama Angel Baby Nipple Butter (all available under on our website under Natural Skincare for Breastfeeding).

Babies who are ineffective at the breast This is rare, but infants that have abnormal shape of the mouth may have this issue.

Stress, fatigue and weakened immune system New mothers often push themselves too hard which can make them susceptible to mastitis.

Irregular feeding schedule Try never to limit or shorten your nursing time as this increases your chances of engorgement (too much milk) and mastitis/breast infections.

Treatment for plugged ducts and mastitis is similar, only with mastitis if you do not see improvement within 24 hrs. you should contact your doctor. The steps you should take to combat mastitis/plugged ducts are as follows²:

- [Apply wet or dry heat to the affected area](#), and remove any dried milk secretions on the nipple by soaking with plain, warm water². Earth Mama Angel Baby Booby Tubes make a wonderful warm compress to help with mastitis and engorgement.
- [Nurse, Nurse Nurse! Nurse the baby on the affected side frequently](#) – at least every 2 hours, including during the night as long as the breast is tender and warm to the touch. Nurse the affected side 1st at each feeding¹. During the feeding massage the sore area in a stroke motion, toward the nipple, to help loosen any obstruction.
- [Loosen constrictive clothing, especially the bra](#)² – many women find it helpful to go without a bra during mastitis as well as switching the style of bra worn each day to prevent too much pressure on any one area of the breast.
- [Make sure the baby is well-positioned at the breast and latches on off-center](#), with the lower jaw as far from the nipple as possible and a large mouthful of breast¹.
- [Vary your nursing position](#). Make sure to vary positions so that all sides of the breast get strong suction. It helps to have the baby's nose pointing towards the plugged area. Some mothers have seen improvement when kneeling over the

baby with the baby on the bed, that way gravity is helping unplug the obstructed duct as well.

- **Rest** Mastitis and plugged ducts are a sure sign that you are not getting enough rest. The best thing to do is to take your baby with you to bed and nurse as often as possible. Basically the two of you should be on bed rest.

Natural Remedies for Mastitis³

Between feedings, use a cold compress on the breast to help with any inflammation, and switch to hot compresses about 10 minutes before feeding (Earth Mama Angel Baby Booby Tubes can also be used hot or cold). Compresses/poultices that can be helpful:

- Make a rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) infusion for the hot compresses: to make an infusion, add 2-4 teaspoons of fresh or dried rosemary to a cup of boiling water. Infuse (steep) for 10 minutes, then strain.
- Use a Fenugreek seed poultice. This is a traditional treatment for engorgement or mastitis. Steep several ounces of fenugreek seeds in a cup or so of water. Let seeds cool, then mash them. Place on a clean cloth, warm, and use as a poultice or plaster on engorged or mastitic breasts to help with let-down and sore spots
- Make a dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*) compress: boil about an ounce of minced dandelion root in two to three cups of water until only half the liquid remains; use compresses of the resulting brew.

If a fever exists take **Raw garlic** - At least 2-3 raw cloves per day, 4-5 cloves a day if possible. Chop a clove into 5 or 6 pieces and then swallow the pieces whole like pills. Raw garlic acts as a broad-spectrum antibiotic, without the added antibiotic side effects of the development of antibiotic-resistant strains of bacteria, or the development of yeast infections or thrush. The antimicrobial property in garlic, allicin, is very sensitive to heat and is destroyed when cooked. In order for it to work, it needs to be raw. Swallowing the cloves with orange juice helps with the taste for some. Allicin is also what gives garlic its pungent odor, so the deodorized garlic capsules that some companies offer are essentially useless, if they are being taken for the antimicrobial properties. However, deodorized garlic is still beneficial for its blood pressure reducing properties and for stimulating the immune system.

- **Tincture of echinacea**, 3-4 times/day
- **Tincture of Oregon grape root**, 3-4 times a day
- **Vitamin C** (3000-5000 mg/day megadose)
- Another option: Mix a dropperful of echinacea tincture, three cloves of raw garlic and four to six ounces of carrot juice in a blender and drink the mixture every two hours.

Natural Remedies for Plugged Ducts³

A regimen of lecithin can be very helpful for treating and preventing recurrent plugged ducts. The recommended dosage is 1 tablespoon three or four times a day, or 1-2 capsules (1200 milligrams each) three or four times a day. B-Complex, Evening Primrose Oil and Thyme have also been recommended for recurrent plugged ducts.

Potato Treatment. Place grated raw, cold, potato on the affected breast. Cover with towels until dry. Repeat if desired.

If home remedies do not change your symptoms within 24hrs.it is best to consult your doctor. When meeting with your doctor some things you should consider requesting: ultrasound of breast to rule out cyst or lump causing blockage, and nasal or oral culture of your baby's milk culture⁴.

Lastly you should examine your nutrition and fluid intake, stress level and any pressures on the breast (bra, baby carrier etc.). It is important to evaluate the probable cause of your infection and to let your body heal completely from it to avoid a recurrence of mastitis in the future.

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1. The Breastfeeding Answer Book, 3rd Revised Edition by Nancy Mohrbacher, IBCLC and Julie Stock, MA, IBCLC
2. The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding published by La Leche League International 5th Edition.
3. <http://www.kellymom.com/herbal/natural-treatments.html#mastitis>
4. Cary, NC La Leche League Leader, Jackie Sinicrope