Engorgement

Engorgement is when breasts become too full with milk and fluid.

You may see these signs for mother
• breasts are swollen, hard and tender
• nipples may become flat

You may see these signs for baby
• may have a hard time latching
• may slip off the breast

How to prevent
• breastfeed often, 10 or more times in 24 hours including night-time feedings
• make sure you have a comfortable latch. If you need help or have questions about your baby’s latch call your public health nurse
• breastfeed when baby shows early signs of hunger
• let the baby stay on the breast until breast is softer or sucking slows. Then offer the other breast
• if baby is not nursing well, express your milk 8 or more times in 24 hours

What to do

Keep breastfeeding
• do reverse pressure softening (see other side)
• express a small amount of milk to feel more comfortable and soften the nipple and areola
• gently massage breast while feeding baby or pumping

For comfort
• use a cool or cold cloth on your breast for about 20 minutes at a time. You can also use a gel pack, bag of frozen vegetables, a diaper soaked with water and chilled, or wear cold, washed green cabbage leaves inside your bra
• take a warm shower with the water hitting your back
• wear a supportive bra with no underwire
• ibuprofen is safe and can help with pain. Read product directions before using
Reverse pressure softening

Two handed, one-step method:
Fingernails short, fingertips curved, each one touching the side of the nipple

One handed “flower hold”:
Fingernails short, fingertips curved, placed around the nipple

Illustrations by Kyle Cotterman, Reverse Pressure Softening by K. Jean Cotterman © 2008

To soften your areola before feeding to make it easier for baby to latch on

- place fingers around nipple as shown. Press inward toward chest wall. Count slowly to 50. It is okay if milk comes out
- pressure should be steady, firm and gentle enough to avoid pain
- if breasts are very large or very swollen, lie down on your back and count slowly while pressing
- get a small amount of milk out of your breast before feeding by hand expressing or pumping
- if using an electric pump, use a low setting

Note: do not do this if you are having pain or if you have plugged ducts or mastitis

How long before it gets better?

- engorgement should only last a few days at most. If it lasts longer than a few days for you, get help from your public health nurse, lactation consultant or other health care provider

Vancouver Coastal Health is committed to helping women successfully breastfeed. Please call your local Public Health Unit for additional information.

Other information on parenting are available at your local Community Health Office/Centre or online at http://vch.eduhealth.ca

You can get further information about breastfeeding from:
Public Health Nurse or Community Dietitian at Vancouver Coastal Health................................................................. www.vch.ca
Baby’s Best Chance................................................................. www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca/parenting
VCH Parenting Website .....................................................http://parenting.vch.ca/
HealthLinkBC .................................................................................................................................8-1-1
Translation services are available in 130 languages.............. www.healthlinkbc.ca

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