

Treatment Tips: Plugged Duct or Mastitis

Signs & Symptoms of a Plugged Duct

- A plugged duct usually appears gradually, in one breast only (although the location may shift).
- A hard lump or wedge-shaped area of engorgement is usually present in the vicinity of the plug. It may feel tender, hot, swollen or look reddened.
- Occasionally you will notice only localized tenderness or pain, without an obvious lump or area of engorgement.
- A low-grade fever (less than 101.3°F / 38.5°C) is occasionally--but not usually--present.
- The plugged area is typically more painful before a feeding and less tender/less lumpy/smaller after.
- Breastfeeding on the affected side may be painful, particularly at letdown.
- Milk supply & pumping output from the affected breast may decrease temporarily.
- After a plugged duct or mastitis has resolved, it is common for redness and/or tenderness (a "bruised" feeling) to persist for a week or so afterwards.

Signs & Symptoms of Mastitis

In addition to symptoms of a plugged duct, mom will also experience systemic symptoms, such as:

- Fever of 101.3°F / 38.5°C or greater
- Chills
- Flu-like aching, malaise

The pain/heat/swelling of mastitis is usually more intense than that from a plugged duct. Mastitis sometimes comes on abruptly, as opposed to the (usually) more gradual onset of a plugged duct.

Managing Plugged Ducts and Mastitis

Heat – Massage – Rest – Empty Breast

Breastfeed frequently & empty the breasts thoroughly. Aim for breastfeeding at least every 2 hrs. If unable to breastfeed, it is important to express milk frequently and thoroughly (with a breast pump or by hand). Keep the affected breast as empty as possible, but don't neglect the other breast.

A plugged duct or mastitis is a message to mom to slow down and get more rest. Adequate fluids and nutrition are always beneficial. If you have mastitis, bed rest (with baby nearby for frequent breastfeeding) and help around the house are recommended.

Before breastfeeding:

- Use heat & gentle massage before breastfeeding. Useful treatments include warm compresses, basin soak with or without Epsom salts, warm shower, massaging plugged area (in shower) with soapy wide-tooth comb or shower massage.
- Loosen bra & constrictive clothing to aid milk flow.

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While breastfeeding:

- Breastfeed on the affected breast first; if it hurts too much to do this, switch to the affected breast directly after let-down.
- Ensure good positioning and latch. Use whatever positioning is most comfortable and/or allows the plugged area to be massaged.
- Use breast compressions.
- Massage gently but firmly from the plugged area toward the nipple.
- Try breastfeeding while leaning over baby so that gravity aids in dislodging the plug.

After breastfeeding:

- Pump or hand express after breastfeeding to aid milk drainage and speed healing.
- Use cold compresses (ice packs over a layer of cloth) between feedings for pain and inflammation.

Do not decrease or stop breastfeeding, as this increases your risk of complications (including abscess).

Medications

A pain reliever/anti-inflammatory (e.g., ibuprofen) may be used as needed for pain due to a plugged duct or mastitis. Second choice for pain relief is a pain reliever alone (e.g., acetaminophen).

Antibiotics are generally *not* indicated for mastitis if symptoms are mild and have been present for less than 24 hours.

If mastitis symptoms are not improving in 12-24 hours, or if you are acutely ill, then call your health care provider. Some of the antibiotics typically used for mastitis include: dicloxacillin, flucloxacillin, cloxacillin, amoxicillin-clavulanic acid, cephalexin, erythromycin, clindamycin, ciprofloxacin, nafcillin. Most sources recommend a 10-14 day treatment to prevent relapse.

Talk to your doctor about starting antibiotics immediately (rather than waiting 12-24 hours) if you have mastitis symptoms *and*:

- Mastitis is in both breasts.
- Baby is less than 2 weeks old.
- A crack (broken skin) has obvious signs of infection.
- Blood/pus is present in milk.
- Red streaking is present.
- Your temperature increases suddenly.
- Symptoms are sudden and severe.

Contact your LC & health care provider if...

- Symptoms do not begin to resolve within 2-3 days.
- Sore nipples begin after antibiotic treatment (consider the possibility of thrush).
- You have any questions.