

BREASTFEEDING CLINIC

SUPPORT • REASSURANCE • INFORMATION • EDUCATION • PASSION

Breast Engorgement (“milk coming in”)

Cause:

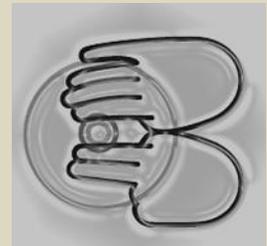
Chief reason is when the **copious** production of breast milk takes off, about **72 hours** after birth and milk is **not** frequently and effectively **removed** it leads to increased **milk** in breasts, and **lymph & blood** that cannot drain away

Symptoms:

Occurring between days 3 - 5 after birth. Breasts may feel **heavy, full, tender** and/or **painful** and **hot**. This can expand into **tight, shiny** breasts that are too congested for the milk to leave → making it difficult for baby to latch or remove milk

Management:

- Keep baby **close** and **feed** as often as possible, at least every 2-3 hours. After birth removing milk from the breasts is critical in helping the blood and lymph drain
- If breasts are/become too firm for baby to latch on, try **softening** the breast around the nipple (pressing fluid gently out of the way) where baby's mouth needs to be, to give baby more softness to latch deeply and remove milk effectively. Do any pressing gently and for a short time; nothing done to the breasts should hurt. Use sides of the index fingers to make slight dents in the area around the nipple. This is called “**Reversed Pressure Softening**” (RPS). Press steadily with the length of the index finger (first joint opposite nipple) on either side of the nipple's base where baby's upper and lower gums will be. Press for 1-3 minutes and then offer breast immediately
- If baby cannot latch even after RPS, gentle **massaging** of the breasts and then gentle hand expression or pumping on a low setting may help (too high pump setting may pull more fluid into the areola - making it more difficult for baby to latch on, and put more pressure on the little ducts inside the nipple making it more difficult for milk to flow)
- ☞ Gentle massage before hand-expression may also help drain lymph fluids backwards.
- ☞ Gravity may also help drain fluids away, a mother can try lying flat on her back while doing RPS
- Now that nipple-areola area is softer, let baby **latch deep** and **drain** the breast
- After the feed a mother may need to gently massage and express the opposite breast just enough to relieve and then apply cold packs or cabbage leaves on both breasts
- Standing in a **shower** and letting the hot water land between the shoulder blades will help stimulate a let-down and a mother can gently **massage** any **lumps** with soaped-up hands



- Inflammation (as a result of engorgement) responds best to **cold**. A mother can try commercial cold packs for breasts or use green cabbage leaves* to help bring down swelling or at least ease the pain

***Green cabbage** leaves may be used chilled or at room temperature

- For engorgement or oversupply **limit use**, as cabbage can decrease milk supply. (During the *weaning* process one can leave the leaves on the breast until they wilt, then apply new leaves as often as needed for comfort)
- Discard the outer, possibly sprayed, leaves. (Red cabbage could stain.) **Peel** off one or more leaves, **wash** cabbage, tear out the hard vein, **crumple** each leaf gently by hand, and **put** the leaves on breasts (not over the nipple) after feeds. Leave on for **20 minutes** at a time and **discontinue** use as soon as engorgement/oversupply begins to subside or within **24 hours**. Leaves should feel nice and cool, and can be held in place with a bra

NB: Extreme **engorgement** can even **damage** a milk supply.... GET HELP sooner than later.

Information presented here is general and not a substitute for personalized treatment from a qualified medical professional.

Read more

- <https://kellymom.com/pregnancy/bf-prep/milkproduction/>
- La Leche League International. 2010. The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding
- Newton M, Newton N. Postpartum engorgement of the breast. Am J Obstet Gynecol 1951;61:664-667
- ABM Clinical Protocol #20: Engorgement. 2016
- <https://www.llli.org/breastfeeding-info/engorgement/>
- <https://kellymom.com/bf/concerns/mother/engorgement/>