

Preventing or Treating Breast Engorgement After the Loss of a Baby

Most mothers who deliver a baby after 20 weeks of gestation will have breast milk following delivery. This may be physically and emotionally painful when you do not have a baby to breastfeed.

Many women find having breast milk after the loss of their baby very upsetting. It might feel like another loss or a cruel reminder of the baby they lost. It is natural to feel sad and angry. You may feel a range of emotions. This is natural and to be expected. It is okay to talk about these feelings.

Your breasts will get larger when your milk volume increases. This usually happens 2 to 5 days after delivery. To relieve discomfort, you can:

- Place ice packs wrapped in a thin towel, or cold cabbage leaves on your breasts. If using ice packs, alternate on and off every 20 minutes. For cabbage leaves, place a cold leaf inside your bra until it becomes warm, and then replace it with a fresh cold leaf. Cold therapy reduces swelling, which lessens the pain.
- Take ibuprofen as directed for pain and swelling.
- Wear a well-fitting bra to decrease discomfort from heavy breasts. Binding the breasts is not advised. It has been found to cause more pain and milk leakage.
- If these comfort measures do not help and your breasts become painfully engorged, you may choose to pump your breasts to reduce the pressure. You will need to slowly decrease how often and how long you pump to stop your milk production. You may pump your breasts for as long as necessary to reduce the pressure, not to empty them. Gradually increase the time in between pumping and pump for shorter periods. For example, if you have been pumping for 15 minutes every three hours, reduce this to:
 - Pump 5 minutes every 4-5 hours for a day
 - Pump 3-5 minutes every 6 hours for a day
 - Pump just long enough to relieve discomfort as often as necessary for the next few days.

It may take from 2 to 7 days to stop milk production. Please call your lactation consultant at (269) 341-8849 (Kalamazoo) or (269) 245-8586 (Battle Creek) with any questions.

Some mothers choose to express their milk and donate it to a human milk bank. Donor human milk banks carefully screen healthy, lactating women and process their donations. The milk is pasteurized and tested to make sure that no bacteria exist and then frozen. The milk is given to sick and premature babies. If you choose to donate your milk, it is important to express the milk from your breasts every three hours for 15 minutes during the day. Don't go longer than 4-5 hours at night without pumping. This will help with your comfort and prevent complications like plugged ducts or mastitis. When you're ready to stop pumping for donation, follow the directions above for gradually stopping. If you do not have a breast pump, please contact your social worker or lactation consultant. They can help you get a breast pump. Please call the Bronson Mothers' Milk Bank at (269) 341-6146 (Kalamazoo) or (269) 245-8586 (Battle Creek) for more information about donating your breast milk.