

Dealing with a Plugged Milk Duct

Written by [Laurel Haring](#) Monday, December 08 2008 16:52

During the first few weeks of nursing, before you and your baby have settled into a nursing routine, one of the challenges you may face is a plugged milk duct. Not to worry. Simple, effective methods will soon have you back on top of your breastfeeding game. I must confess, when I had a plugged milk duct, I had no idea what was wrong. There I was, a nursing counselor and nursing my second son, and I was clueless. Fortunately, I had resources, and a little research soon gave me the answer I needed and – more importantly – the tools to deal with the problem.

What Causes Plugged Ducts?

A plugged milk duct can be caused by a bra that's too constricting. It can also be caused when a duct isn't completely drained. When it comes to nursing bras, you want good support, first and foremost. You also want to be sure that the bra doesn't bind, press, or pinch your breast tissue.

How to Tell if You Have a Plugged Duct

In those early days of nursing, you probably were amazed and maybe a bit disconcerted by all the changes that happened to your breasts. When your milk came in, your formerly soft, rounded breasts became huge, hard, and achingly painful.

A plugged duct usually presents itself as a tender lump or small area in your breast. By taking some simple steps at this stage, you'll be able to keep that plugged duct from becoming infected, leading to mastitis and possibly an abscess.

How to Unplug Those Ducts

Nurse, nurse, and nurse some more. Your baby is the most effective way of removing the blockage. When baby is hungriest, start him on the breast where the plug is. Make sure that your baby is latching on properly, and point the baby's chin so that it's pointing toward the tender spot. Be sure to vary the baby's feeding position so that he drains all areas of your breast. Of course, you can also use a breast pump or manually express your milk.

A hot shower and warm compresses can also provide some relief and are especially effective when done right before you nurse. Dampen a washcloth with hot water but do make sure that it's not so hot that it will burn you. Make a quick, inexpensive moist-heat compress with plain white rice and a sock. Just put the rice (uncooked) in the sock, tie a knot in the end, and toss it in the microwave for about two minutes. The rice provides moist heat for a surprisingly long time.

You can massage your breast before nursing, and it will help move the plug down the duct and toward the nipple. However, the type of massage you need in this situation isn't the gentle rubbing you might think it is. To move the plug out of the duct and toward

your nipple, you start by applying pressure to the area of your breast that is closest to your chest wall. Applying gradually increasing pressure with the heel of your hand, easing off before the pressure becomes painful, and then press again, gradually increasing the pressure. Move your hand about a half-inch closer to your nipple and repeat. Do this all the way toward your nipple. If you've dislodged the blockage, your baby will remove it during the next nursing session. Again, be sure to start the baby on the affected breast, when her sucking will be strongest.

Plugged ducts aren't a lot of fun, but they're not impossible to handle. As always, contact your pediatrician or lactation consultant if you have concerns.

About the Author

Laurel Haring is a writer. She lives with her family in Wilmington, Delaware, and posts semi-regularly to her blog, [Let Me Say This About That](#) . Her own experience with a plugged duct ended well ... once she figured out what was going on. Fortunately for her, son #2 was a powerful nurser and was able to bring relief right away.

<http://www.typeamom.net/dealing-with-a-plugged-milk-duct.html>