

Nipple Blisters or Blebs

A nipple blister (or bleb) starts as a white or yellow spot on the nipple. If it breaks open immediately, you may only see a tiny red spot. A bleb is usually quite painful, but not always.

- **Although not completely understood**, a nipple blister/bleb is often a bulging damaged milk duct. It may appear after trauma to your nipple. If your baby's latch has not been assessed, you may want to see a lactation consultant (IBCLC). With an older baby, a common cause of a bleb is a baby "yanking" on the nipple to stimulate a faster milk flow, or to see who walked into the room!
- **If a bleb is not painful and not causing any problems**, it is okay to do nothing and let it resolve on its own.
- You may apply a warm, wet pack, or a cotton ball soaked in olive oil, to your nipple to soften the bleb. **If the bleb is less than 48-hours old**, gentle manipulation of the nipple behind the plug may cause the softened skin to open. It can also be opened with a sharp, sterile needle. This may not be successful if the blister is more than a few days old and is best attempted by your healthcare provider.
- **Once the bleb "opens,"** apply an over the counter, antibiotic bacitracin or polysporin ointment to your nipple after each breast feeding or pumping for a week or so to try and prevent the bleb from closing again and to protect against infection.
- **If a bleb does not "open,"** or if milk seems to be flowing more slowly than usual, milk may back up and create a tender mass in the breast. This could lead to mastitis. (See our information on **Plugged Ducts and Mastitis**.) Some mothers have found that soaking their nipple in warm saltwater inside of a manual silicone breast pump (like the Haakaa) helps to clear the bleb. Fill the Haakaa with warm water, mix in 1 T Epsom salt, and soak the bleb for 15 minutes every two to three hours until the bleb clears.
- **Rest frequently and eat well.** Mothers who are experiencing recurrent plugged ducts within the breast may benefit from taking soy or sunflower lecithin (~1200 mg three to four times a day).
- While blebs may be annoying and painful, they are not harmful unless they completely stop milk flow from part of the breast, leading to a breast infection (mastitis) or loss of milk production from that area of the breast. **If a bleb is painful and not resolving with the above measures**, a prescription, mid-potency steroid ointment can be applied after nursing and covered with a ~six-inch square piece of plastic wrap (to help the medication penetrate deeper). Apply the ointment after every breast feeding or pumping session until your nipple is no longer painful and milk is flowing freely. Do not continue to use the steroid ointment more than one week if the bleb is not improving, and do not use the steroid ointment longer than two weeks total.

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