Plugged Ducts & Mastitis

A plugged duct is a plug of milk that sits in a milk duct, causing new milk to “back up”. You may feel a firm or lumpy area in your breast that is more noticeable when your breast is full. If you feel a lumpy area in your breast and your breast is red, you feel achy like you have the flu, or you have a low-grade fever (less than 38.4 C or 101 F), you have mastitis, or inflammation of the breast, which may or may not involve an infection.

What can you do?

- **Continue to breastfeed your baby frequently** (8-12 + times in 24 hours).
- **Rest (go to bed!)** and drink plenty of fluids.
- **Apply heat** to your breast before breastfeeding to promote drainage. You may also apply a castor oil pack before breastfeeding or pumping: pour castor oil liberally onto a warm, wet washcloth – apply it to the firm or lumpy area on your breast – cover with plastic wrap – apply a heating pad so area feels warm (but not hot) - leave in place for ~20 minutes. **Rinse breast with water before breastfeeding** or pumping to avoid baby ingesting the castor oil.
- **Massage and compress** the firm or lumpy area on your breast while breastfeeding or pumping.
- **Pump** the affected breast if your baby does not thoroughly drain the breast after feeding, or if baby refuses the breast.
- **Take ibuprofen** to reduce inflammation (up to 400 mg every 4 hours).
- **For recurring mastitis or plugged ducts**, consider taking lecithin: 1200 mg, 3-4x/day.

**IF YOU NOTICE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING:**

- You see no change in 12-24 hours (you feel no better),
- Your fever continues, or goes higher than 101 F,
- The red area on your breast increases in size, or you see red streaks on your breast,
- You see blood or pus in your milk, or
- You have a cracked nipple on the breast that is red and sore.

**YOU MAY NEED AN ANTIBIOTIC.** Please call your physician or nurse-midwife. If you are prescribed an antibiotic, take the complete prescribed course, and consider taking a multi-strain probiotic as well.

Reviewed: copyright January 2019

Creating a healthier community by helping mothers breastfeed their babies.