

# Nipple Blisters or Blebs

A nipple blister (or bleb) starts as a white or yellow spot on the nipple, however, if it breaks open immediately, you may only see a tiny red spot. It may be tender and can be quite painful.

- **Although not totally understood**, we think that a nipple blister or bleb is a bulging damaged milk duct. Often a bleb occurs after trauma to a nipple. If your baby's latch has not been assessed, you may want to see a lactation consultant (IBCLC). If your baby is more than a few months old, a common cause is "yanking" on the nipple to stimulate a faster milk flow, or to see who walked into the room!
- **If the 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 in order 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 bleb 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,"** we recommend that you apply some lanolin ointment to the nipple after each breastfeeding for a week or so to try and prevent the bleb from closing again. An antibiotic ointment (like Polysporin) may also be a good choice to protect against infection.
- **If a bleb does not "open,"** it may cause milk to back up and create a tender mass in the breast – a plugged milk duct. This could lead to mastitis. For more information, see our hand out on ***Plugged Ducts and Mastitis***.
- **Rest frequently and eat well.** Mothers who are experiencing recurrent plugged ducts within the breast may benefit from the addition of lecithin to their diet (~1200 mg three to four times a day).
- While blebs may be annoying and painful, they are not harmful unless they lead to mastitis. **If a bleb is painful and not resolving**, breastfeeding medicine specialists will often prescribe a steroid ointment. You can try applying a very small amount of 1% hydrocortisone ointment (available over the counter) to the bleb and cover with a large (~six-inch square) piece of plastic wrap. Repeat after every time you breast feed or pump until it is no longer painful. Do not continue after one week if the bleb is not improving, and do not use the steroid ointment longer than two weeks total.

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