

Nipple Blister or Bleb

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 well understood**, we think a nipple blister/bleb is usually caused by nipple trauma. If your baby's latch has not been assessed, or you are pumping and think your pump may have caused the bleb, you may want to see a lactation consultant (IBCLC). With an older baby, a common cause of a nipple bleb is a baby "yanking" on the nipple to stimulate a faster milk flow, or to see who walked into the room! In a younger baby, it can be associated with baby pinching to slow fast flow.
- **If your bleb is not painful and not causing any problems**, it is okay to do nothing and let it resolve on its own.
- **If your bleb is not "open,"** or if milk seems to be flowing much 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. Or if the bleb is <48 hours old, it can be sliced opened by a healthcare professional with a sterile needle, but this seldom works after 48 hours.
- **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 for more than one week if the bleb is not improving, and do not use the steroid ointment longer than two weeks total.



5930 South 58th Street
Lincoln, NE 68516
(Trade Center)
402.423.6402

10818 Elm Street
Omaha, NE 68144
(Rockbrook Village)
402.502.0617

www.milkworks.org
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