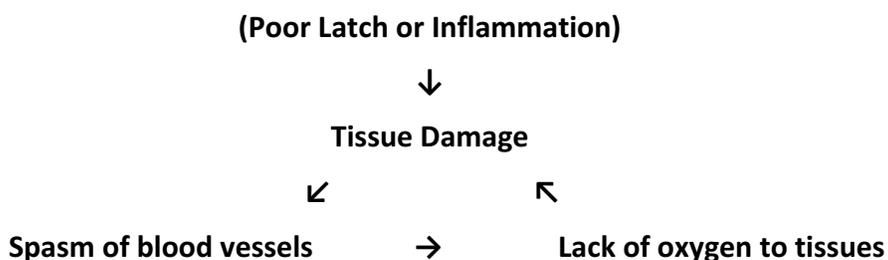


Vasospasm of the Nipple

A spasm of blood vessels (vasospasm) in the nipple can result in nipple and/or breast pain, particularly within 30 minutes after a breastfeeding or a pumping session. It usually happens after nipple trauma and/or an infection. Vasospasms can cause repeated **disruption of blood flow to the nipple**. Within seconds or minutes after milk removal, the nipple may turn white, red, or purple, and a **burning or stabbing pain** is felt. Occasionally women feel a tingling sensation or itching. As the nipple returns to its normal color, a throbbing pain may result. Color change is not always visible.

If there is a reason for nipple damage (poor latch or a yeast overgrowth), the cause needs to be addressed. This can be enough to stop the pain. Sometimes the vasospasm continues in a “vicious” cycle, as depicted below. **While the blood vessels are constricted, the nipple tissue does not receive enough oxygen. This causes more tissue damage, which can lead to recurrent vasospasm, even if the original cause of damage is “fixed.”**



To promote improved blood flow and healing of the nipple tissue:

- See a lactation consultant (IBCLC) or a breastfeeding medicine specialist for help with latch and/or pumping **to reduce future nipple damage**.
- When your baby comes off your nipple, or you finish a pumping session, **immediately cover your nipple** with a breast pad or a towel to keep it warm and dry.
- Apply a heating pad (set on “low”) to your nipple(s) over your bra and/or clothes for at least 5 minutes **after every nursing or pumping session, as well as any time you feel pain between breastfeeding or pumping**. This is especially important to do for 72 hours to allow good blood flow to reach your nipples and help them heal. You should experience a significant decrease in degree and frequency of pain at the end of 72 hours.
- **You may also want to wear 100% wool, or polar fleece, breast pads at all times** between breastfeeding or pumping. These pads help to keep your nipples warm and dry, thus avoiding vasospasms due to wet and/or cold nipples.
- If the above measures are not helpful AND you routinely experience **Raynaud’s phenomenon** (vasospasm in your fingers in response to cold) you may benefit from taking Nifedipine. This is a prescription medication (pill) and is VERY rarely required to relieve symptoms.

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