



What is breast engorgement?

Breast engorgement is a buildup of breastmilk and swelling in the breast.

It's normal to have a feeling of fullness in your breasts when they start to make milk about 2 to 4 days after having your baby. This fullness should go away after 24 to 48 hours if your baby is feeding 8 to 12 times a day.

Your breasts may become engorged if your baby skips feedings or does not feed well enough to remove the milk from your breasts.

How do I know if I have breast engorgement?

Your breasts may be engorged if:

- They feel hard, hot and tender
- Your nipples are flattened
- Your skin looks shiny and tight from swelling

If you have a fever or feel ill, this may be a sign of a breast infection and you should contact a lactation specialist or your doctor.

How do you treat breast engorgement?

- Use cold cloths/ice packs between feedings to help with the swelling and pain, especially the first week of breastfeeding.
- Massage your breasts toward your armpit to relieve the swelling between feedings.
- Gently massage your breasts toward the nipple before and during feedings.
- Before feeding your baby, take a warm shower or put warm, moist cloths on your breasts to help the milk flow.
- If your baby feeds only from 1 breast, hand-express or use a breast pump to remove milk from the other breast.

- If your baby can't latch on due to flattened nipples, use a breast pump, hand express or use massage to soften the area around your nipples to help them stick out.
- Breastfeed or pump at least every 2 hours until the engorgement is better and your baby is breastfeeding well.

How do I prevent breast engorgement?

- Removing as much of the milk from your breasts often is the best way to keep them from becoming engorged.
- Breastfeed your baby at least 8 to 12 times in a 24-hour period.
- If your baby misses a feeding, use a pump to get the milk out of your breasts.
- Feed your baby from the breast that feels fuller first.
- Wear a bra that is supportive and fits well. Do not wear underwire bras.
- If you are weaning your baby, do it gradually. Slowly stop breastfeeding over several days or weeks.

When should I get help from a nurse or lactation specialist?

Ask the nurse or lactation specialist to help you if:

- Your breasts continue to feel painful and full
- Your nipples stay flattened
- You're having trouble getting your baby to breastfeed

Contact us

If you have questions, please contact our Lactation Support Program at (617) 355-0005.

This Family Education Sheet is available in Arabic and [Spanish](#).