

# Blocked or narrowed duct while breastfeeding

If an area of your breast becomes inflamed, it can cause some narrowing in the milk ducts. This can make it difficult for the milk to flow freely. It is often called a blocked or narrowed duct or localised breast inflammation.

It is generally not caused by a 'plug' of milk blocking a milk duct.

## Signs of a blocked or narrowed duct

Signs of a blocked or narrowed duct can include:

- a hard and tender lump when you press on your breast
- the skin on the affected area might look darker or red - depending on your skin tone
- expressed milk may appear thickened or stringy
- flu-like symptoms such as feeling achy and run down
- areas of the breast may feel warmer to touch

## Causes of a blocked or narrowed duct

A blocked or narrowed duct can happen when:

- there are long gaps between feeds - for example, if your baby slept through a feed
- your breasts are engorged - this often happens in the early days when the volume of milk is increasing quickly
- your bra or clothing is too tight or there is pressure from a wired bra
- your baby is not [positioned or attached](#) well
- you apply too much pressure when massaging your breasts

## What you can do for a blocked or narrowed duct

There are things you can do at home to help relieve a blocked duct.

### Gentle massage

Very gently massage your breasts in a circular motion. Apply a light touch when doing this and use the

flat of your hand (as if you are petting a cat). Continue the gentle touch all the way towards your armpit.

Be careful not to apply too much pressure when massaging. This can cause damage and scarring to sensitive breast tissue. It can also increase the risk of more inflammation.

## Cold comfort

Use a cold pack or cool moist face cloth to reduce swelling and relieve pain - after a feed or in between feeds.

## Breastfeed as normal

Breastfeed your baby as normal - in response to your baby's feeding cues. While breastfeeding, gently compress your breast, just behind the sore area.

Overfeeding or expressing unnecessarily may make your symptoms worse. If you feel overly full or uncomfortable at times, you can offer to breastfeed or gently hand express to get some relief.

## Pain relief

Ask your GP or pharmacist about using anti-inflammatory pain relief like ibuprofen. You can alternate this with paracetamol, unless there is a medical reason why you cannot take both types of medicine. Take it regularly for at least 2 days or until your symptoms are relieved. Always read and follow the medicine instructions.

## Plenty of rest

Get as much rest as possible. Laid-back or lying down breastfeeding positions will allow you to rest. Sleep when your baby is sleeping. Ask your partner, family or friends to help out.

### Contact your GP if:

- you still have a blocked or narrowed duct after 48 hours
- you have a fever or flu-like symptoms that do not improve after 24 hours - you may need medicine for a [mastitis](#) infection

Antibiotics are not always needed to treat mastitis.

## Get breastfeeding support

For help and advice on a blocked or narrowed duct, contact your:

- midwife
- public health nurse

- [local breastfeeding support volunteer](#)

[Ask our breastfeeding expert](#)

Page last reviewed: 16 November 2023

Next review due: 16 November 2026

## HSE Live - we're here to help

Monday to Friday: 8am to 8pm

Saturday: 9am to 5pm

Sunday: Closed

Bank holidays: Closed

Freephone: [1800 700 700](#)

From outside Ireland: [00 353 1 240 8787](#)

[HSE Facebook](#)

[HSE Instagram](#)

[HSE TikTok](#)

[HSE YouTube](#)

[HSE LinkedIn](#)

[HSE X \(Twitter\)](#)

[Complaints and feedback](#)

[Emergencies](#)

[Cookie settings](#)

[Cookie statement](#)

[Accessibility](#)

[Privacy statement](#)

[Disclaimer](#)

© Health Service Executive