

Mastitis

Mastitis is an infection of the breast that can occur in breastfeeding mothers. Nobody knows exactly why some women get mastitis and others do not.

Causes

- Bacteria or yeast entering your breast through a cracked, sore nipple
- Too little milk being removed from the breast that leads to plugged ducts and then mastitis
- The stress and tiredness of new motherhood
- Extreme engorgement
- Weaning your baby from breastmilk too quickly
- Missing feedings when your baby starts to sleep longer at night

Signs of mastitis

- Fever, chills
- General flu-like achiness all over
- Severe pain, warmth, and redness of your breasts

Mastitis begins quickly. It most often affects only one side but can occur in both breasts. You will need to see a doctor and get antibiotics to treat the infection.

Once you are taking antibiotics, mastitis should improve quickly. If you don't start to feel better within 24-48 hours, see your doctor again. Continue to breastfeed and take all of the medication prescribed by your doctor.

It is safe to breastfeed your baby when you have mastitis.

Talk with a Public Health Nurse, call
Client and Community Support
1-800-265-7293
ext 7006

Steps to help you recover

- If breastfeeding is too painful, ask your public health nurse how to express your milk by hand or with a breast pump.
- Breastfeeding drains your breast and helps mastitis get better quickly.
- Begin on the sore breast and allow your baby to nurse as long as possible. Massage the sore area to encourage the flow of milk while your baby sucks. If you are too uncomfortable to start feeding on the sore breast, start feeding your baby on the comfortable side and switch to the sore side once your milk starts flowing.
- Gently massage the tender area of your breast while breastfeeding or while soaking in a warm tub or shower.
- Using alternate positions for feeding can help your breast to drain better. Your public health nurse can give you suggestions.
- Ultrasound treatments at a physiotherapy clinic can be helpful too. The dose is 2 watts/cm² continuous for five minutes, once a day for 1-2 days.
- Avoid tight clothing such as an underwire bra.
- Try to get lots of rest and drink more fluids to help fight the infection.
- Accept all offers of household help from your friends and family.
- It is safe to take over-the-counter medication such as Ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) or acetaminophen (Tylenol) for fever and pain relief. For further information ask your doctor or pharmacist.
- Be sure to finish all of the antibiotics prescribed for you even though you may be feeling better.
- Mastitis can re-occur so get help at the first signs of another infection.