

LACTATION CARE PLAN: BREAST & NIPPLE SWELLING



Right after delivery: Swelling of the breast, areola, and nipple often occurs due to intravenous fluids administered during labor and delivery. IV fluids are often given with labor induction, augmentation, prolonged labor, epidural, or cesarean section. Even minimal ankle edema may indicate breast swelling is present.

Engorgement: Swelling often worsens on day 2-4 after delivery. This happens when the milk begins to 'come in'. Blood flow to the breasts increases, triggering the milk to increase in volume. This also causes swelling in the breast tissue which compresses the delicate milk ducts. Left untreated, this can lead to severe pain and compression of the milk ducts, causing inability to express milk.

Even if the swelling is not very apparent on physical exam, it may cause problems with latch and transfer of milk from breast to baby. It is very important to take prompt measures to decrease the swelling. This can improve latch, decrease nipple trauma and pain, and increase the chance of the lactating parent successfully establishing breastfeeding.

DECREASE SWELLING BY:

- Frequent nursing, minimum of 8 times in 24 hours
- Lymphatic drainage massage.
Do this gently before each breastfeeding or pumping session and as needed to ease breast swelling and discomfort between feedings.
- Reverse pressure softening
Do this before latching to gently push edema away from the nipple making latch easier.
- Frequent cold compresses to breast tissue
- NSAID such as ibuprofen in anti-inflammatory doses, if medically appropriate per lactating parent's physician or other care provider.
- Acetaminophen as needed for discomfort.

MY RISK FACTORS:

- Intravenous fluids
- Labor induction or prolonged labor
- Epidural
- Cesarean section delivery

WHAT NOT TO DO:

- Tell me I have flat nipples:
The swelling makes nipples appear flatter.
- Give me a nipple shield:
This doesn't fix the swelling and may cause more lactation problems than it solves.
- Firm massage or excess pumping:
This increases breast inflammation, causing more swelling, worsening the problem
- Excessively pump to 'get the milk out'