

Many new mothers experience sore nipples and breasts at some point in their breastfeeding journey. While there are certainly women who have pain-free breastfeeding, studies suggest that a lot of mothers in the United States and other countries experience some kind of nipple pain.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that 3% of breastfeeding mothers experienced agonizing pain the first time they nursed their babies, while 26% reported no pain at all. Research also shows that breastfeeding pain is one of the main reasons why women give up breastfeeding within a few weeks or months.

In general, breastfeeding is not supposed to hurt, but in reality, it can. When this happens, it usually means that something needs to be fixed so that mother and baby can be more comfortable. Remember that if you're experiencing toe-curling pain and it doesn't go away after 15 seconds, there might be a problem that you need to address.

Here are some of the common breast pain problems during breastfeeding. You'll find tips on their symptoms, causes, and possible methods of treatment:

## **Most Common Problems of Breastfeeding Breast Pain**

It's important to know the most common problems associated with breastfeeding and understand the reasons why they occur and, most importantly, what you can do to resolve the issue. Usually, this kind of breast pain can be treated moderately quickly. This is why you should never put off finding remedies or asking someone for help.

Ignoring the pain only makes it worse and most of the time these problems could be prevented with proper care and regular breastfeeding. With this guide, you will be able to watch out for the signs of a breastfeeding problem and seek appropriate treatment.

### **1. Full breasts**

**Symptoms:** You may feel uncomfortable. Your breasts may feel hot, heavy, and even lumpy. Milk would even leak involuntarily from your breasts.

**Reason:** New mothers experience full breasts 3 to 5 days after birth. The first volume of breast milk is produced during this time, and it's normal to feel the fullness.

**What you can do:** As you feed your baby, the fullness naturally decreases. Make sure that your baby is latching properly and breastfeed him frequently to remove the excess milk. Your milk production will eventually adjust to your baby's demand so patiently wait for a few days and your milk supply should be normal.

### **2. Blocked milk ducts**

**Symptoms:** There's a tender, hard lump in your breast. The spot may feel hot and look red.

**Reason:** Narrow tubes or ducts inside the breast carry milk from the glands to the nipples. If one segment of your glands is not drained completely, it can lead to a plugged or blocked duct. This is why it mostly occurs in mothers who have abundant milk and happens more often during the first few weeks of breastfeeding.

Other reasons are irregular feeding schedules and an improper latch or position. Putting pressure on your breasts may also be a factor such as when you sleep on your stomach or place a bag strap across your breasts. Over time, your milk production will adjust to your baby's needs. Be aware, however, that untreated plugged ducts may lead to an infection.

### 3. Latch problems

**Symptoms:** Breastfeeding causes discomfort and your nipples hurt. They may look sculpted or squeezed after a feeding. They may also have blisters. Problems with latch may also make your baby fussy or underweight. He may also bite the nipple if he's not getting enough milk.

**Reason:** The baby uses his tongue to get the milk out and if the nipple isn't far back, the tongue rubs or puts pressure on the nipple and causes pain. A good latch means that the nipple is inside the mouth fully and touches the back (the soft part of the mouth).

Another reason is engorgement as it makes latching difficult. A baby who's used to bottle-feeding may also have a shallow latch at the breast.

#### **What you can do:**

It primarily depends on improving the latch. You usually just need a minor change in positioning to make a huge improvement.

- To get a good latch, support your baby's weight and put your hand between his shoulder blades.
- Support your breast with your fingers under the breast and the thumb close to the nipple. This lifts the breast up and makes it easier for your baby to feed.
- Align your baby's mouth with the breast's underside.
- Aim your nipple at his nose. Encourage your baby to latch by stimulating his lower lip.

If it still hurts, don't try to solve it on your own. Ask a lactation consultant or find any La Leche League leader in your area to help you.

## **Knowing the Signs Helps You Get Treated**

Most experts say that breastfeeding is not supposed to hurt at all, but the truth is for some women it could hurt and sometimes it hurts really badly. Telling women that breastfeeding

shouldn't hurt invalidates their experiences and makes them feel that they're doing something wrong when in fact there are factors that are beyond their control.

It's important that we inform new mothers of the potential pain of breastfeeding. Sugarcoating will just prevent them from getting the right treatment at the beginning as they second-guess what is happening. This is not to say that all women will experience breast pain while breastfeeding as many women do enjoy pain-free breastfeeding, but if you're among those who experience mild to extreme pain, we encourage you to seek treatment as soon as you can.

With the right care, you will learn what is and isn't normal and with enough preparation, you can also prevent problems from occurring. Do not let the fear of pain stop you from breastfeeding. Most mothers agree that despite the pain they would still breastfeed all over again.