

Plugged Duct Treatment and Mastitis

Plugged ducts are painful segmental areas of the breast where the milk has plugged the milk duct, and the milk producing areas in that part of the breast can not drain well.

Plugged ducts are painful due to inflammation so the main treatment should be to reduce inflammation. Cold compresses after feeds can be helpful, taking anti-inflammatory medication like Ibuprofen/Advil regularly until the pain subsides, and NO MASSAGE or very gentle massage as outlined below.

DO NOT do extra emptying of your breasts, instead feed or pump regularly in the amount the baby needs, extra pumping or feeding can make plugs worse because it signals your brain to make more milk.

Submerging your breasts in warm water with epsom salts prior to breastfeeding or pumping can also help. Alternatively you can use a warm pack or take a warm shower.

If you have a Haakaa pump you can fill it with warm water and epsom salts and suction it onto the breast for a few minutes, this can often get plugs out: <https://haakaausa.com/blogs/everything-about-the-4th-trimester/how-the-haakaa-breast-pump-can-help-clear-plugged-milk-ducts>

Gently massaging the breast towards the armpit can also help with plugged ducts. This is often called therapeutic breast massage. This link is to a video that explains this technique: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1E3eYbT9UY>

If the plugged ducts are persistent you may require therapeutic ultrasound which is available at some physical therapy clinics. In Calgary it is available at:

[Interactive Health 403-547-2099](tel:403-547-2099)

[Lakeview Physiotherapy - Lori Walker Krause, 403-249-5253](tel:403-249-5253)

[Christie McSween Physiotherapy - 587-318-0065](tel:587-318-0065)

Lecithin is a food supplement that seems to help some mothers prevent plugged ducts. It works by breaking up fat globules into smaller globules, which decreases the viscosity (stickiness) of the milk. It is safe and effective. It comes in two forms - soy and sunflower. The dose is **1200-1600 mg up to 4 times a day**. If you develop a persistent hard red area on your breast and fevers/chills you may have an infection (mastitis). Contact your physician to discuss if you need antibiotics and continue to breastfeed and/or pump to extract the milk.

Finally, plugged ducts are not in themselves dangerous, but if the ducts are not released you can develop complications such as decreased milk production or Mastitis.

Mastitis is inflammation in one part of the breast that is not draining well due to obstruction. If you have low grade fever, mild pain, and a segmental red area on your breast treat as above. ***If things do not improve in 12-24 hours, if you have high fevers, if the area of redness/pain is increasing, if you have streaks on your breast, or if you have blood or pus coming from the nipple see your doctor right away.***

You will likely need antibiotics as well as the above measures to treat the infection.