

Breast Engorgement in the First Week Postpartum

On the third or fourth day postpartum your breasts may feel heavy, warm and uncomfortable and may increase significantly in size. This is normal and excellent sign that your breasts are switching to the production of copious milk. Frequent, effective breastfeeding will quickly help. However, some women find that their breasts become so swollen that it is difficult or impossible to latch the baby. This needs to be addressed quickly both for your comfort and to prevent damage to your milk supply.

If your breasts are hard, but little or no milk comes out when you pump, **the problem is most likely edema – fluid retention** in the tissue between your milk ducts. You may notice swelling in your feet and ankles too. The swelling in the breast tissue makes it difficult to express the milk so your focus will be on clearing this fluid as well as expressing the milk.

What to do if baby can't latch

Pump! If your baby is struggling to latch, you may want to rely on your pump with frequent 5-10 minute sessions. You may find it easier to pump only one breast at a time, massaging the breast as you do so. Your goal is to extract any milk that is available while you massage out the edema. Firm circular motions (the same that you would do to check for a breast lump) work well for both goals. Stop when milk no longer comes out. Frequency is the key to clearing the engorgement.

Massage! Search for this Vimeo video: *The Basics of Breast Massage and Hand Expression by Maya Bolman.*

Research shows that twenty-minute applications of **cold** are effective at reducing the swelling and allowing milk to flow more freely. You can do this any time, even right before pumping or breastfeeding. A brief application of **heat** (maximum 5 minutes) can help release milk. Longer use of heat can draw more fluid into the breast.

Massaging the areola around the base of the nipple may help release your milk. This may also soften the area so that you can pump or breastfeed more effectively. Google “reverse pressure softening”.

Some mothers wrap their engorged breasts in cold cabbage leaves. Take out the large veins and flatten the leaf. There is certainly nothing harmful in doing this and it seems helpful.

For more information please check kellymom.com/bf/concerns/mother/engorgement/

Too much milk causing painful engorgement. Some mothers have a very rapid onset of high milk production. Milk will be leaking, baby will be gulping and gaining weight, and the breasts will be softer after breastfeeding.

Massage the most uncomfortable spots while you feed so that you can soften them. Make sure the baby is totally satisfied. If at the end of the feed your breasts are still painfully full, **it is okay to pump out just enough milk to bring relief.** Do not empty your breasts as this could cause more production. You may also have some edema and may benefit from following the suggestions for this problem too.