How to Relieve Breast Pain
When You Don’t Breastfeed after Delivery

Most mothers who deliver a baby over 20 weeks of gestation will make breast milk after delivery. If mothers don’t breastfeed, that will cause breast fullness, maybe even pain.

Engorgement (over-full breasts)
You may have engorgement when the milk comes in, about 2 to 5 days after delivery. For more comfort, you can:

- Take hot showers. A small amount of milk usually leaks out. This may help soften the breasts.

- Express a little milk. Place your fingers at the edge of the areola (darker brown area). Press back toward your ribs, then squeeze the thumb and fingers toward each other as you roll them forward. Do this just until you feel less fullness in the breast.

- Take ibuprofen or acetaminophen for pain and swelling (follow package directions for dose).

- Cold compresses reduce swelling, which will give some relief. Place ice packs on the breasts for 20 minutes, then off for 20 minutes. For example, use frozen peas or crushed ice. Put them in a Ziploc bag, thin towel or pillowcase.

- Wear a well-fitting support bra that holds the breasts firmly, day and night. Do not bind the breasts. That may cause more pain and milk leakage.

Breast Pumping
If these tips do not help and your breasts become full and painful, you may want to use a breast pump to reduce the pressure.

Pump your breasts just long enough to reduce the pressure, not to empty them. Little by little, increase the time in between pumping, and pump for fewer minutes.

For example:

- Pump 5 minutes, wait 4-5 hours, then pump 5 minutes. Repeat this for a day.

- On the next day, pump 3-5 minutes, wait 6 hours, and then pump 3-5 minutes. Repeat this for a day.

- Then, pump just enough to relieve pain, as often as you need to, for the next few days.

It may take from 2 to 7 days to stop milk production. Each woman will find the right pace for herself.

Need help with engorgement or pumping?
For help, contact your health care provider.
If you are a WIC client, call your WIC site for help.
If you need a referral number for help with engorgement or pumping, call the Public Health Clearinghouse at 1-888-604-4636.