

Plugged Ducts

A **plugged duct** happens when your breast becomes swollen and creates pressure on your milk ducts. When this happens, milk doesn't drain well from your breast and results in a **firm, tender section** of your breast. A plugged duct usually occurs when you have gone a **longer stretch than usual** without breastfeeding or pumping or if your baby or pump is **not appropriately removing milk** from your breasts.

Some women feel a lump or a "tube" inside their breast the size of a walnut, a golf ball, or even a tennis ball. Others feel a **whole section of their breast that just feels "hard."** Still others feel **localized breast pain** without noticing a lump or hard area. Generally, the breast tissue also swells, so it is **more difficult for milk to drain.**

Treatment:

Decrease Swelling

After and between breastfeeding or pumping:

1. Take 600 mg ibuprofen every 6 hours around the clock
2. Use cold compresses such as a bag of ice wrapped in a towel to the tender, swollen area(s) of your breast for 20 minutes on/20 minutes off
3. Soy or sunflower lecithin 1200 mg 3–4 times per day (3600–4800 mg/day) can reduce swelling and improve milk flow

Move Milk

Before breastfeeding/pumping:

1. Take a warm shower or apply a warm compress (warm washcloth, rice sock, or heating pad) to the affected area for 5–10 minutes

During breastfeeding:

1. Continue to apply warmth to the affected area (if possible)
2. Offer the **affected breast first** at feedings
3. **Gently** massage/compress your breast during feedings
4. Alternate positions when you breastfeed your baby
5. Ensure that your baby has a deep latch

NOTE:

- The “plug” will likely decrease in size/soften with each breastfeeding/pumping session and clear after several breastfeeding/pumping sessions (within 72 hours of onset).
- The affected breast may feel tender and bruised after the plug has cleared (for 48–72 hours).
- The milk supply in the affected breast may be decreased for several days but should rebound as long as the normal feeding and/or pumping pattern is not interrupted or changed.

Get Help

Follow the Mastitis plan if:

- You develop a low-grade fever
- You develop flu-like symptoms (chills, body aches)
- Your breast is red, warm to the touch, or very tender

Contact your IBCLC if:

- If your plug does not soften or get smaller after breastfeeding or pumping
- You have repeated plugged ducts (more than 2–3 per month)

Contact your Midwife/OB if:

- You have a plugged duct that does not improve after 3 days
- You develop a fever of 100.4° F or higher

Persistent Plugged Ducts:

When plugged ducts **do NOT clear easily** after following the plugged duct protocol or continue to reoccur, try the tips below:

- Pump the affected breast after breastfeeding for 10–15 minutes to remove any milk left behind (you can **gently** compress the breast while pumping)
- Try **gently** massaging (lymphatic drainage), hand expressing, or hand pumping while in a hot shower
- Sleep on the side opposite the affected breast
- Taking soy or sunflower lecithin 1200mg 2 times per day (2400 mg/day) as a maintenance dose to help prevent plugged ducts
- **Avoid:**
 - Vigorous or deep tissue massage
 - Use of vibrators/massagers
 - Saline soaks/Epsom salt in a silicone pump (haakaa)