

# Mastitis

## Definition:

Mastitis is a bacterial infection of the breast that can occur in breastfeeding mothers. No one knows exactly why some women get mastitis and others do not. Bacteria may gain access to the breast through a crack or sore in the nipple, but women without sore nipples also get mastitis.

## Causes:

- Poor latch-on and/or ineffective
- Cracked or sore nipples
- Babies who are ineffective feeders at the breast
- Consistent or sustained pressure on the breast
- Unusual stress and fatigue and a weakened immune system
- Missed or shortened feedings and irregular breastfeeding patterns

## Symptoms:

- Comes on suddenly
- Is localized – usually one breast is affected
- The breast is red, hot, tender and swollen
- The pain is intense but localized to one area
- Flu-like symptoms – achy with general bad feeling
- Temperature is 101\* or higher

## Treatment:

Call your physician immediately; you need medical evaluation and typically antibiotics. Also, try these nursing interventions to assist the healing process:

- Apply wet or dry heat to the affected area-gently massage the are while it is warm and remove any dried milk secretions on the nipple
- Massage the affected area while it is warm, working over the lump using the palm of the hand and all fingers while applying gentle but firm circular motion pressure
- Breastfeed the baby or hand express or pump immediately after treating the area with warmth and massage
- Breastfeed at least every 2 hours and start on the affected breast as long as the breast is tender and warm to the touch
- Loosen constrictive clothing, especially the bra
- Make sure the baby is well-positioned at the breast and latches well
- Vary nursing positions
- Rest

## References:

Mohrbacher, N. and Stock, J. *The Breastfeeding Answer Book* Third Edition, Schaumburg, Illinois 2003, pages 496-507.

Spangler, A. *Breastfeeding A Parent's Guide* seventh edition, Abbey Drue, Inc. 2000 pages 75-76.

Newman, J. and Pitman P. *The Ultimate Book of Breastfeeding Answers* Three Rivers Press: New York 2006, page 127-129.