

Plugged Duct

Definition:

A Plugged duct is where an occlusion or plug has occurred in the milk passageways. This plug prevents milk from passing through or the milk passage may be slower than usual, due to the pressure causing collapse of the other ducts.

Causes:

- * A plug most commonly occurs from inadvertently pressing against the breast while breastfeeding to clear the nostrils from pressing into the breast – instead of pressing into the breast try repositioning or bringing the baby in closer to you and allowing the head to tilt back slightly.
- * Tight constricting clothing or bra
- * Underwire bras
- * Over supply of milk
- * Delayed or skipped feedings

Signs and Symptoms:

- localized mild breast pain that occurs gradually and may shift in location
- no warmth or heat is felt on the breast
- no fever or aches

Treatment:

1. Continuing breastfeeding and offer the affected breast first
2. Apply moist heat to the affected are prior to breastfeeding (2-3 minutes)
3. When breastfeeding position the baby where his chin “points” to the area of hardness. Thus if the blocked duct is in the outside, lower area of your breast (about 4 o’clock), the football hold would be best.
4. While the baby is actively feeding massage the affected area, stroking toward the nipple in attempt to dislodge the plug
5. If this is unsuccessful – after applying heat to the area, allow gravity help drain the breast by breastfeeding in a position where the breast is “hanging” down and breastfeed leaning over the baby. For example – baby can lay on his back on the bed and mother will lean over to breastfeed

If you notice a small white “**milk blister**” on the end of your nipple that cannot be wiped off - Moisten the area with a warm washcloth and gently rub the area to dislodge the plug then gently pull the plug lose. Sometimes you can squeeze out a little toothpaste like material from the duct and the duct will immediately unblock. Or, put the baby to the breast and he may unblock it for you. Opening the blister has the added benefit of decreasing nipple pain, even if the blocked duct does not immediately resolve.

When to call the doctor:

If you have a lump that is not going away or not reducing in size, or the area becomes red, hot, tender, or swollen consult your physician right away or if you experience a fever with a general bad “achy” feeling. This could develop into a condition called “mastitis” which requires a medical evaluation and typically antibiotics. Refer to the care plan for “mastitis” for more information.

Resources:

Spangler, A. *Breastfeeding a Parents Guide*, seventh edition. Abbey Drue, Inc., 2000 p. 73-75.

Mohrbacher, N. and Stock, J. *The Breastfeeding Answer Book*, third edition. Schaumburg, Illinois: 2003 page 496-506.

Newman, J. and Pitman P. *The Ultimate Book of Breastfeeding Answers* Three Rivers Press: New York 2006, page 124-126