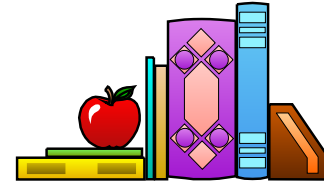


Treatment of Breast Engorgement



As your milk increases in volume between days two and five after birth, the breast becomes fuller, firmer and heavier which is caused by increased blood and lymph circulation as well as milk. The breast needs to be soft enough that the baby can effectively latch, suckle and empty the breast without causing you discomfort.

Occasionally, the breast may become swollen, hard and painful, or engorged. The baby has difficulty latching. The discomfort increases as the baby is unable to relieve the pressure. This is not due to just milk, but also due to increased swelling that accompanies the increase in milk volume.

Cabbage leaves have been noted to be an ancient remedy for swelling due to sprains, strains, infections, surgery, and breast problems. The first written record of the use of cabbage for the "caked" breast was published in 1892 in the United States. In the past several years, the use of cabbage leaf compresses for breast engorgement has gained popularity again because of the amazing results.

Action

As the cabbage leaf is placed on the skin, there is a decrease in swelling and better flow of milk. The cabbage is removed as soon as the breast is soft enough for the milk to flow. The length of time needed to make this happen varies with each mother. Most mothers get immediate relief from the discomfort, although it may take up to three or four applications of cabbage of two or three hours each to relieve the swelling. As long as you continue to breastfeed and/or pump, your milk will not dry up, even if you use the cabbage around the clock.

Do not use cabbage if you are allergic to cabbage.

Cabbage can also be used to help dry up your milk if you wish to wean, but has to be applied to the breast continuously for at least 24 to 48 hours (changing when it wilts), without stimulating the breasts (no nursing or pumping) in order for it to work this way.

Application

Use a head of green cabbage with large green leaves. Discard the outer two leaves; take the inner leaves, wash, pat dry, and crush slightly. The leaves may fit over the breast better if the large vein going up the middle of the leaf is removed. Wear your bra to keep the cabbage in place. Change the leaves every hour or so or when they have become limp or wilted. Check your breasts frequently, and as soon as you feel the milk beginning to drip or the breast feels "different", remove the leaves and either breastfeed or use a pump to get the milk to flow. Reapply as needed. Attempt to breastfeed or pump at least every two hours until the milk is flowing freely and the baby can nurse easily.

Use icy cold compresses along with the cabbage to reduce the swelling for about 15 minutes at a time. If you take a warm shower, have the water flow along your back which is very relaxing. Don't be afraid to pump to relieve the discomfort and get the milk flowing. Although your breasts may still feel full, as long as the milk is flowing, and the baby can latch without discomfort for you, you are well on the road.

If these measures don't relieve the engorgement within about 24 hours, contact your lactation consultant for more help.