



Women's, Infants, and Children  
Supplemental Nutrition Program

Department of Public Health  
City and County of San Francisco

# Engorgement And Sore Nipples

## Engorgement

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- ☐ Engorgement means your breasts are swollen because they have a lot of milk in them.
- ☐ Some engorgement is a normal sign of milk "coming in", which occurs 3-5 days after birth.
- ☐ The best way to relieve engorgement is to breastfeed your baby more often.
- ☐ **If you feel engorged:**
  - To reduce swelling: Apply ice packs placed on top of a towel over your breasts for about 20 minutes between feedings. In place of ice packs you can wet two disposable diapers and freeze them 15-30 minutes.
  - 15-20 minutes before feeding, place warm packs on the breasts. You may also take a warm shower with breasts facing the water to help the milk flow. While you are in the shower hand express some milk to soften the areola.
  - Breastfeed frequently, about every 1 1/2 to 2 hours. Have your baby nurse both breasts at each feeding.
  - If your breasts are full and firm your baby may have trouble latching on to your areola. You can hand express milk until milk flows easily and the nipple and areola are softer.
  - Make sure your baby empties your breasts with each feeding. Your breasts should feel soft after feeding. If your breasts still feel full and your baby is satisfied, express extra milk from your breasts (see information sheet called "Pumping Your Breast Milk").
- ☐ **Engorgement usually lasts only one to four days and will get better in a short while. It is important to keep breastfeeding to relieve your symptoms.**



## ***Sore Nipples***

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Some women have sore nipples in the first few days of breastfeeding. **Here are some ways to keep from getting sore nipples, and to treat sore nipples:**

- ☐ Check the position you hold your baby in while breastfeeding. The most common cause of sore nipples is incorrect positioning (see information sheet called Your Guide to Breastfeeding).
- ☐ Be sure your baby's mouth is over the areola. If your baby is sucking just the nipple (tip of your breast), break the suction to remove the breast from the baby's mouth, and start again.

Your baby's lips should be one to one and one half inches onto your areola. This is how much of the areola would be covered by your baby's mouth as you look down at him breastfeeding:

\_\_\_\_\_ (1 1/2 inches)



- ☐ To remove your breast after feeding, place your finger in the corner of the baby's mouth to break the suction. This helps prevent sore nipples.
- ☐ If only one nipple hurts, start the feeding on the breast that does not hurt. Babies suck harder when they first start a feeding. Then nurse on the side that hurts.
- ☐ Express some milk before nursing so your baby will not have to suck so hard to stimulate let down.
- ☐ Continue nursing as often as the baby wants.
- ☐ Take acetaminophen (Tylenol® or Ibuprofen®) 1/2 hour before nursing.
- ☐ Check your hand position to make sure you are not pointing the nipple up and rubbing it into the roof of the baby's mouth. Make sure your fingers are not covering the areola.
- ☐ Put some breast milk on your nipples and areola after nursing. Let your nipples air dry.
- ☐ If you notice any burning pain in your breast when you nurse, call your doctor. Some sore nipples may be caused by thrush or another infection in the baby's mouth.

**For breastfeeding questions, pump loans, classes, or other help, call your WIC Clinic.**

Standards for participation in the WIC Program are the same for everyone regardless of race, religion, national origin, color, sex, political beliefs or handicaps. Persons believing they have been discriminated against may write to: Secretary of Agriculture, United States Department of Agriculture, Washington D.C. 20250. Developed by the San Francisco Department of Public Health WIC Program, Rev., 8/2002.