

Breast-feeding: Engorgement

Engorgement is the swelling, hardness, heat and discomfort of the breast that occurs when the milk begins to “come in.” Sometimes women also have a slight fever. Often nipples flatten and the baby may have trouble latching on. Engorgement usually occurs between the third and fifth day after delivery. It lasts about 24 to 48 hours if properly treated.

Not all women become engorged. If it does not occur, this does not mean your milk has not come in. Engorgement can often be avoided if the baby is nursed often and for unlimited periods of time. You can tell if your milk has come in by certain signs listed below:

- The clear or yellowish colostrum changes to a white, thinner-appearing breast milk.
- Your breasts are softer after nursing.
- You can hear your baby swallow milk.
- You can see milk in your baby’s mouth after nursing.

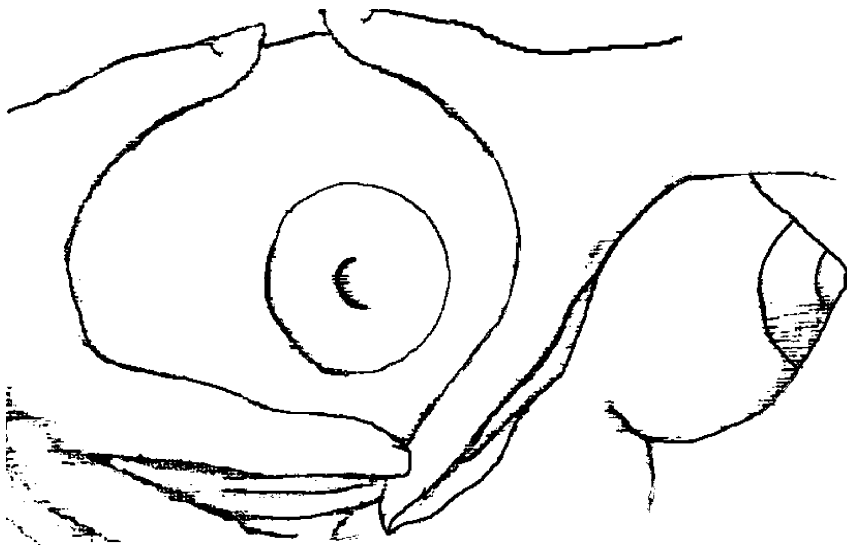
If you become engorged:

1. Use *warm*, moist compresses on your breasts or take a warm shower *before nursing*.
2. Soften the areola so your baby can “latch on” by doing breast massage followed by breast pumping or hand expression.
3. Nurse every 2 to 3 hours around the clock for at least 15 minutes on each

breast. Make sure your baby is properly latching onto the areola. If your baby will not nurse this long on both sides, massage and express or pump your breasts until they feel softer. See illustration of manual massage (Figure 1) and expression (Figure 2) on the back of this sheet.

4. Do not offer bottles between feedings or instead of feedings at night.
5. Take a mild pain pill, such as Tylenol or Advil, a half-hour before nursing.
6. Rotate among the cradle, football and side-lying positions when nursing.
7. Apply *ice* to your breasts for 10 minutes *after nursing* to decrease the swelling and discomfort. You may also try cold, uncooked, green cabbage leaves:
 - First, remove outer leaves and discard.
 - Wash cabbage in cool water. Pat the leaves dry.
 - Break the veins in the leaves (to activate the enzyme in the leaves).
 - Place in the refrigerator to cool.

Figure 1: Manual Massage



Cup your breast with both hands and gently massage from the base of the breast to the areola. Do this several times.

- Place the cool leaves on your breasts in your bra, leaving the nipple uncovered.
- Wear the cabbage leaves for 10 minutes. Apply again if needed.

Most of the time, 1 to 2 applications are all that is needed. Do not use for longer than 24 hours, since prolonged use can decrease your milk supply.

8. Try to relax while nursing to assist the flow of milk.
9. Be sure your bra is not too tight, as this will close down the milk ducts. Do not wear underwire bras. Remove your bra while nursing to assure emptying of all the milk ducts.
10. Never smoke while nursing. This can be harmful to your baby and will interfere with your milk flow.



Call your doctor or lactation consultant if you:

- Do not have relief with these measures.
- See any redness or streaking, or develop a fever or flu-like symptoms.

Figure 2: Manual Expression



Lift your breast and compress between your thumb and fingers, drawing gently forward to express a few drops of milk. Repeat this movement at several points all the way around the areola to reach the other milk sacs.