Breast Feeding – Blocked Milk Duct

A blocked milk duct is a tender or painful hard lump in the breast of a breast feeding mother. A blocked milk duct is different from mastitis (an inflammation or an infection of the breast) because you will not have a fever or feel like you have the flu with a blocked milk duct. It can be caused by:

- Skipped or delayed feedings
- Skipped or delayed pumping
- Breast feeding only on one side and not relieving the opposite breast
- Pressure from wearing a tight bra or clothing
- Pressure from mom’s finger forming an “air hole” for the baby to breathe during nursing
- A sleeping position that puts pressure on one area of the breast
- Weaning or changes in your baby's breast feeding pattern
- Half emptying or not fully emptying your breast
- An abundant milk supply

If your baby is able to breast feed:

- Apply moist heat to the affected breast prior to feeding.
- Breast feed on the affected breast first. This allows the ducts to empty more completely.
- Be sure your baby is properly attached onto your breast.
- Gently massage and compress the area of your breast with the blocked ducts while nursing to empty the ducts more completely.
- Change your baby’s position at each feeding (cradle, side-sitting, cross cradle, lying down, football) in order to empty your ducts more completely.
- Nurse every 2 to 3 hours and be sure your baby is nursing effectively.
- If baby nurses on just one side, be sure to pump the other breast.
- Wean your baby gradually when you and your baby are ready to wean from breast feeding.
If your baby is currently not breast feeding and you are pumping:

- Apply moist heat to the affected breast prior to pumping.
- Gently massage and compress the area of your breast with the blocked duct while pumping.
- Pump consistently every 2 to 3 hours for 10 to 15 minutes on both breasts.

Other helpful tips:

- You may use acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Advil®) for discomfort as needed (if you are not allergic to these medications).
- Take care of yourself by getting enough rest, eating nutritious foods, drinking enough fluids, and getting help with your baby and household responsibilities.

A blocked milk duct usually goes away in 24-48 hours with treatment. Blocked milk ducts may worsen into mastitis if not treated. Also see "Breast Feeding – Mastitis" CARE CARD.

Call the Lactation Management Program Help Line at (816) 346-1309 if the problem gets worse or does not disappear within 24 hours.