Breast Feeding – Sore Nipples

It is not uncommon to experience some nipple tenderness in the first week of breast feeding a new baby. Severe nipple pain or long lasting pain is not normal and needs to be treated.

Sore nipples may be caused by:

- Your baby not latching on properly
- Your baby not sucking properly
- Improper breast care (such as soap on your nipples, which can lead to dry, irritated skin)
- Pumping with an incorrect size breast shield
- Pumping with the suction too strong

Before feeding:

- Wash your hands.
- Make yourself comfortable and relax.
- Express a small amount of breast milk by hand or pump to soften the areola (darker part of your breast around the nipple) and to stimulate the milk ejection reflex before your baby begins to nurse.

During feeding:

- Offer the breast that is least sore first. Babies suck the strongest at the beginning of the feeding to help your milk let down.
- Make sure your baby is properly positioned and you are supporting your breast properly.
- Wait for your baby to open wide before latching. Make sure the baby is able to latch on to as much of the areola (darker part of your breast around the nipple) as possible in his mouth. If the latch is too sore, relatch and try to get baby on deeper.
- Change the position of your baby at each feeding (cradle, side-sitting, lying down, football).
- Nurse often – at least every 2 to 3 hours for 10-15 minutes.
- When removing your baby from the breast, gently break the suction by inserting your finger between the baby’s gums and your breast. You should be able to hear the suction release.

After feeding:

- Gently express a few drops of breast milk onto your nipples and allow to air dry.
- If you use breast pads, be sure that they are not made of plastic. You can also use clean white handkerchiefs or cut maxi-pads.
- Use a fresh breast pad after each feeding, or as needed.
- You may choose to apply a small amount of purified lanolin ointment to soothe your sore nipples. Do not use lanolin if you are allergic to wool.
- The lanolin ointment does not need to be washed off before the next feeding.
Before pumping:

- Wash your hands
- Make yourself comfortable and relax.
- Properly center the breast shield on your nipples.
- Decrease the suction pressure on the breast pump until your nipples heal. Once nipples are healed, maintain a comfortable suction pressure.

After pumping:

- Gently express a few drops of breast milk onto your nipples and allow to air dry.
- If you use breast pads, be sure that they are not made of plastic. You can also use clean white handkerchiefs or cut maxi-pads.
- Use a fresh breast pad after each pumping.
- You may choose to apply a small amount of purified lanolin ointment to soothe your sore nipples. Do not use lanolin if you are allergic to wool.
- The lanolin ointment does not need to be washed off before the next feeding.

Remember:

- Breast feed your baby before he is overly hungry or upset. This will help you relax and enjoy the feeding.
- Avoid drying agents (soap or alcohol) on your nipples.
- If your nipples are cracked, they may bleed when your baby is nursing or you are pumping. Your baby may spit up a small amount of this blood or you may notice pink-tinged breast milk with pumping. A small amount of blood in your breast milk from a cracked nipple will not hurt your baby. Continued breast feeding is encouraged.
- You may use acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Advil®) for discomfort (if you are not allergic to these medications).
- Take care of yourself by getting enough rest, eating nutritious foods, drinking enough fluids, and asking for help with your baby and household responsibilities.

Call your doctor or nurse, or the Lactation Management Program Help Line at (816) 346-1309, if:

- Your nipple pain is severe or you have cracked bleeding nipples.
- You still have sore nipples after 24-48 hours following the measures above.
- You have questions or concerns.
- You want to schedule a Lactation Clinic appointment for a breast feeding assessment and feeding assistance.