

# Breast care after loss



The time after the loss of your baby can be physically and emotionally exhausting. Caring for your breasts during this time is important, as it will help make them more comfortable and reduce the risk of blocked ducts and mastitis.

## How long will I have milk?

Colostrum (early breast milk) is produced as early as 16 weeks into pregnancy. Even when your baby has passed, your breasts will make milk. Some women welcome this as proof their baby was real while other women find the reminder very painful.

It may take some weeks (or even longer) for your milk to disappear completely. Leakage may still occur for some time after the discomfort has settled. You may like to talk with your midwife or doctor about medications to stop or reduce your breastmilk.

## Breast care

To ease your breast discomfort, we suggest you:

- Wear a comfortable, supportive bra and breast pads
- Apply cold packs and change them often

## Medication to suppress breastmilk

Medication (Dostinex - cabergoline) to suppress breastmilk can be ordered by your doctor, but it needs to be given within 24 hours of the birth.

(eg chilled washers or a bag of frozen peas)

- Avoid heat on your breasts
- Take paracetamol as directed, to relieve pain and discomfort
- Express enough milk to relieve fullness to keep your breasts comfortable. This does not increase your supply because you are not emptying your breasts.

You may need to continue expressing for several days to help prevent the pain of sudden engorgement or mastitis.

## Established milk supply

If your milk supply has established and your baby has passed, we suggest:

- Gradually decrease the number of times you express and the amount of milk removed from your breasts over several days. This is particularly important for any mother who has been expressing with a pump for more than two weeks.
- Continue to drink enough fluids
- If you are unsure about your particular situation, seek the guidance of a healthcare professional or an Australian Breastfeeding Association counsellor.

## Mementos

Some mothers may like to freeze a small amount of breastmilk as a memento.

## The day of the funeral

This will be a long and emotional day. These tips may help:

- Express milk for comfort before the funeral and during the day as needed
- Your breasts may leak milk, so be prepared with breast pads and have some spare
- Wear your bra comfortably firm but NOT tight
- Dark-coloured or patterned tops are less likely to show wet patches and a cardigan or jacket can help hide spots
- Paracetamol taken as directed will help ease breast pain

## Further support

It may be helpful to speak with others who have lost a child, for example Red Nose.

You may wish to contact a grief counsellor or counselling service eg National Association for Loss and Grief.

For further advice and support please speak to your GP or contact the services below.

### Frequently used terms

**Engorgement:** uncomfortably full breasts

**Blocked ducts:** the uncomfortable build up of breastmilk in a duct that is blocked resulting in a breast lump

**Mastitis:** an inflamed, sore, swollen or red breast with or without fever like symptoms

## Contacts for support

### Australian Breastfeeding Association

Phone: 1800 686 267 (7 days a week)

[www.breastfeeding.asn.au](http://www.breastfeeding.asn.au)

### MotherSafe (Medications in Pregnancy and Lactation Service)

Sydney Metro area: (02) 9382 6539 or

Statewide: 1800 648 848

<http://mothersafe.org.au>

### Red Nose (24 hour bereavement support)

Phone: 1300 308 307

### NALAG (National Association for Loss and Grief)

Phone: (02) 6882 9222

<http://www.nalag.org.au>

## Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District

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Twitter: @NBMLHD

YouTube: Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District