

Breast Engorgement

Care for Non-Breastfeeding Moms



Breast engorgement means that your breasts are overfilled with milk. This can be a major concern at approximately three to five days postpartum, when the amount of your breast milk increases rapidly. Breast milk production will begin whether you delivered vaginally or by C-section, even if you don't breastfeed. If you have breast implants or tight breast tissue, you may be at an increased risk of engorgement because there's not a lot of room to allow for swelling. Engorgement will decrease slowly, though it may last up to 10 days. Engorgement helps your body decrease milk production.

What will happen to my breasts if I'm not breastfeeding?

- As your breasts fill with milk, they may begin to feel full or sensitive. Breasts may leak to relieve pressure for several weeks postpartum.
- You may feel pea-sized lumps throughout your breasts and they may get larger. They may be firm to the touch and tender. These same lumps may be felt in your armpits and are normal during breast engorgement.
- When your breasts become engorged, they'll be warm, red, swollen and hard. During this stage, the leaking generally stops. This usually lasts for two to three days.
- A fever higher than 100.4F and muscle aches may also occur with breast engorgement.

What can I do?

- Wear a bra with firm support. Avoid stimulating your nipples.
- When taking a shower, avoid letting the warm or hot water run over your breasts. Hot water opens milk ducts and increases swelling. Instead, wash under your breasts as needed and minimize the amount of time you let the water run over your breasts. It's alright to avoid washing your breasts for a few days.
- Don't try to remove milk from your breasts by pumping or massaging if you aren't planning to breastfeed. This will stimulate more milk production and make the engorgement worse.
- Use ice packs, bags of frozen veggies/fruit or cool compresses for 20 minutes at a time for comfort and to reduce swelling. Wrap ice packs or frozen bags in cloth before placing them on your skin.

When should I call my health care provider?

Contact your health care provider if you have a fever and muscle aches lasting longer than a day, the swelling gets worse (even with treatment), or you have questions or concerns.

References:

- La Leche League International. 2000. New perspectives on engorgement. <http://www.lalecheleague.org/lleaderweb/lv/lvdec99jan00p134.html>
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