



Mastitis, and What You Can Do if You Get It

Mastitis means an inflammation in your breast. It's sometimes due to an infection, but may not be. Signs include:

- A warm or hot, sensitive (sometimes painful) area on one breast (rarely both) that may look red or have reddish streaks
- Sometimes fever and/or chills and/or generalized aching, as though you have the flu.

How did you get it? Often nobody knows. Maybe cracked or damaged nipples that let germs in, plugged ducts, ineffective or infrequent nursing (or pumping), pressure from a bra or baby carrier, being overtired and run-down (“holiday mastitis”).

What can you do? You may want to talk to your doctor about a prescription for antibiotics. It may not be an infection, so you could try other treatments first.

- Empty Breast, Lots of Rest. That means (a) frequently nursing, pumping, or hand-expressing to keep the milk moving and (b) spending as much time as possible in bed or lying down, resting or sleeping.
- Cold packs (such as frozen peas wrapped in a cloth) or other sources of cold on the inflamed area, twenty minutes on, twenty minutes off, or a heating pad, whichever feels better.
- Over-the-counter anti-inflammatory medication that your doctor approves.

No worse after 24 hours? You can repeat for another 24. No better? Think about antibiotics.

For more suggestions, see the Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine’s mastitis protocol at bfmed.org/Resources/Protocols.aspx.