

PROBLEMS OFF YOUR chest

If breastfeeding hurts, there *is* something you can do. **SIMONE CASEY** shares remedies for common breast complaints

While mamas and bubbas are both learning to breastfeed, it's pretty normal to have a few hiccups, such as cracked or sore nipples, or other problems that require the assistance of a health professional to clear up. If breastfeeding is painful, it's important not to accept that as part of breastfeeding or just expect your nipples to toughen up and the problem to resolve, but to seek help early. Whether that's turning to experts such as the Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA), seeing a qualified lactation consultant or breastfeeding-friendly GP, or booking into a local breastfeeding clinic, there's likely to be an explanation and treatment to suit your ailment. Read on for more advice... >

CRACKED NIPPLES

What to look for Nipple pain with breastfeeds, especially at the beginning. There will also be signs of trauma on your nipple, such as cracks, blistering or bleeding.

What causes them? The main cause of cracked nipples is bub attaching incorrectly to the breast. If the latch is too shallow, the nipple will rub on your baby's hard palate, causing friction – that's when the damage occurs.

What can I do? Slathering on a pharmacy full of creams and ointments won't do anything unless you can work with your baby to achieve a deeper latch to the breast. "The good news is that cracked and grazed nipples are a temporary problem that can be overcome with timely and accurate information and support," says the ABA's Renee Kam. "Contacting a breastfeeding counsellor on the ABA Helpline on 1800 686 268 can help, as can seeking advice from a lactation consultant by visiting www.lcanz.org."

MASTITIS

What to look for An area on the breast that becomes red, hot, swollen, painful and usually difficult to drain. There's also often fever, aches and tiredness.

What causes it? Mastitis is an inflammation or infection of the breast tissue caused by poor drainage of the breast or damaged nipples.

What can I do? Although you may be tempted to take

a break from breastfeeding or express instead of feed from the affected breast, GP and lactation consultant Dr Anita Bearzatto advises breastfeeding your baby frequently instead, as bub's sucking is usually more effective in draining the breast than a pump. Also, "apply a heat-pack to the breast before a feed, massage the breast during the feed and apply a cold-pack after the feed," she

says, making sure you have someone to look after you so you can get plenty of rest and keep up your fluids. "Pain relieving or anti-inflammatory medication may be needed, as well as appropriate antibiotic treatment," she says, for which you'll need to see your doctor. So you don't get a repeat episode of this painful and emotionally draining condition, make sure you work on improving positioning and attachment at the same time.

BLOCKED DUCTS

What to look for A sore lump on the breast, often close to the areola, which can often feel quite bruised to touch. There may also be lesser flow on the affected side.

What causes them? If one of the milk ducts isn't drained well, this can lead to a blockage. This can happen due to incorrect attachment, your baby going longer between feeds, or even a tightness on the breast such as an ill-fitting bra, a tight seatbelt, or sleeping on your stomach.

What can I do? Move that milk! "Apply some heat to the affected area of your breast for a few minutes before feeding to help soften up the breast tissue," suggests lactation consultant

Shona Cassels, then utilise your baby's hungriest sucking by feeding on the sore side first for the next few feeds. Massaging any lumps towards the nipple in the shower can also help. "When massaging, you might like to use your fingers as if you are playing a piano, or make a fist and use your knuckles in a rolling motion," Shona advises. Another sure-fire way to move a stubborn blockage before it turns into mastitis is – believe it or not – to use gravity to flow everything downwards and feed on all fours. It feels a bit weird at first, but you simply lie your baby on a bed and lower your breast into his mouth. Afterwards, "apply something cool to your breast to keep down any swelling," says Shona.

"If the latch is too shallow, the nipple will rub on your baby's hard palate, causing friction"

THRUSH

What to look for Nipples may feel itchy, irritated and sensitive, even to very light touch. There may be increased pain when latching your baby on and a deep, sharp, shooting, burning or aching pain through the breast. It can be in one or both breasts and the nipples can appear red, shiny or flaky.

What causes it? Thrush is a fungal infection that can occur if there's been a recent history of antibiotic use, if you have cracked nipples or vaginal thrush, or if your breastfeeding baby has oral thrush or a fungal nappy rash.

What can I do? "An antifungal gel, like miconazole gel, is recommended for the nipples and can be

carefully applied to the baby's mouth even if the baby has no signs of thrush to prevent the mother or baby reinfecting each other," says Dr Bearzatto. "In cases of severe thrush, the mother may require a course of oral antifungal medication prescribed by her doctor." During treatment, change breast pads frequently and maintain good hygiene with hand-washing, as well as regular laundering of towels and bras. Dr Bearzatto also recommends several dietary changes, such as reducing or avoiding foods that increase the risk of thrush, including those containing refined sugars, dried fruits, peanuts, Vegemite, grapes, cantaloupe and alcohol. Probiotics may also be helpful.



"An inverted nipple is rare and retracts when squeezed. More common, though, is a flat nipple, which has a very short shank"

INVERTED OR FLAT NIPPLES

What to look for An inverted nipple is rare and retracts when squeezed. More common, though, is a flat nipple, which has a very short shank. It doesn't stick out much so it can be hard for bub to latch onto.

What causes them? Genetics. Nipples come in all different sizes and shapes, but luckily babies breastfeed, not nipple-feed. All babies can learn to feed from their own mummy's nipples, whatever their shape and size. In the end, your little doesn't know any differently.

What can I do? "Getting breastfeeding off to the best start possible can help to overcome anatomical variations," says Renee, who adds that pregnancy can naturally push out a mum's flat or inverted nipples. Where possible, aim for a non-medicated birth (babies sleepy from a medicated birth often find it harder to attach to the breast, especially if nipples are flat or inverted), skin-to-skin contact immediately after the birth for at least an hour, rooming in with your baby in the hospital, and feeding your little bundle as often and as long as he wants. Feeding from inverted or flat nipples "can be overcome with time, patience and a few tricks," says Renee. "Some mothers find the use of a nipple shield helpful, but these should only be used after a consultation with a breastfeeding counsellor or lactation consultant."

VASOSPASM

What to look for Similar to thrush symptoms, if you have vasospasm there can be intense pain in one or both nipples and a stinging pain in the breast during, after or in between feeds. The distinguishing feature of this condition, though, is the nipples blanch white or become a purple colour when they have been exposed to cold.

What causes it? The blood vessels that provide blood to the nipples become temporarily narrowed as a result of exposure to cold. Vasospasm can also occur after damage to the nipple from poor attachment. The same condition can occur in other blood vessels of the body, especially in the

hands and feet (known as Raynaud's syndrome).

What can I do? "Stay warm!" says Dr Bearzatto. "This may include dressing warmer, not airing out the nipples, and heat application to the breasts, especially after a feed." There are a few products that may help ease symptoms, including wool breastpads or pads specially designed to reflect your natural body heat, as well as improving positioning and latch of your baby. Dr Bearzatto advises to avoid smoking, as nicotine worsens vasospasm, and taking magnesium along with fish oil supplements to improve circulation. "In severe cases, a prescription medication may be recommended."

WHITE SPOTS/BLEBS

What to look for A white spot on the nipple that looks a bit like a large, white pimple. If the spot has been there a long time, skin may have grown over it. It's usually accompanied by discomfort during feeds.

What causes them? White spots can indicate there's a blockage of one of the milk-duct openings on the nipple. The spot itself can be like a curd of milk stopping the milk flowing out. A bleb is an overgrowth of skin over a milk duct pore on the nipple.

What can I do? "Feed as frequently as your baby will allow on the affected side while optimising positioning and attachment," says Renee. To try and get rid of the spot yourself, "gently rub some olive oil into your nipple, soak your nipple in warm water and then rub with a face washer," she adds. "If all these things fail, a medical adviser may use a sterile needle to remove the white spot." ★

The National Health and Medical Research Council recommends that babies be exclusively breastfed until around six months of age, with breastfeeding to continue alongside appropriate first foods until at least 12 months of age. While breastfeeding is the ideal way to nourish your baby, we recognise that not all mums are able to do so. If you have any concerns about your breastfed or bottle-fed baby, make an appointment with your child health nurse or GP.

ADVERTORIAL

SOOTHING RELIEF

Rite Aid Hydrogel Breast Discs cool and soothe sore and cracked nipples, creating the optimal environment for healing broken and inflamed skin. The discs absorb leakage, keeping the skin dry and preventing infection and the build-up of bacteria. By cooling irritated skin, Rite Aid Hydrogel Breast Discs aid discomfort, allowing you to continue breastfeeding your bub. In a study of 106 lactating mothers, participants who used Hydrogel Breast Discs experienced a significant reduction in pain than those who used lanolin ointments (Dodd et al, 2003). The discs are safe to use while breastfeeding and can be used in conjunction with Rite Aid Nursing Pads for added comfort and peace of mind.

