



# Mastitis

Patient information

**Mastitis is an inflammation of the breast that may or may not develop into a bacterial infection.**

The most important part of managing mastitis is to reduce the inflammation and keep the milk flowing.

## How do I know I have mastitis?

When there is localised breast inflammation you may feel tenderness in the breast, a firm area in your breast, or some redness of this area, but no general symptoms of fever and chills.

Progression to mastitis presents as general body symptoms of fever, chills and a fast heart rate. The breast is red, swollen, hot and more painful than a localised inflammation.

## How does mastitis develop?

There are many reasons why the breast becomes inflamed, including poor position and attachment at the breast, a large milk supply in excess of your baby's needs, nipple trauma, long stretches between feeds, very full breasts, illness and separation. Ceasing breastfeeding suddenly can also lead to mastitis.

## How do I prevent mastitis?

Preventing inflammation in the breast is key to stop the progress to bacterial mastitis:

- Breastfeed often – a newborn baby needs eight to 12 feeds in 24 hours.
- Avoid long periods between feeds.
- Alternate the breast you start on so that both breasts have milk removed regularly.

- Make sure your baby is positioned and attached well at the breast, so there is efficient removal of your milk. Seek assistance to check your baby is attaching and feeding well.
- Seek help promptly from your midwife or lactation consultant to manage nipple damage.
- If your baby is not breastfeeding or not breastfeeding well, you will need to express so your breasts are soft and comfortable and you have enough milk to meet your baby's needs.
- Avoid deep massage of your breasts, as this will increase the inflammation.
- Unless medically required, do not give your baby formula or other fluids.
- Support your breasts by wearing a comfortable bra and rest when you can and you will need to express so your breasts are soft and comfortable, and you have milk to meet your baby's needs.

## Inflammatory mastitis

Start prevention measures as soon as you notice a red or sore area on the breast:

- Continue to breastfeed your baby or express your milk to meet your baby's needs and maintain your supply.
- Place cold packs on the breast to give comfort and reduce the swelling.
- Applying heat is not recommended.
- Pain relief may be required.
- Anti-inflammatory medication also helps with pain and swelling.
- Very gentle stroking of the breast towards the armpit will help move the excess fluid.
- Avoid deep massage as this can increase the swelling.

## Bacterial mastitis

If there is increasing pain, redness and firmness in your breast or fever continuing longer than 24 hours with a fast heart rate, seek medical attention.

Your GP may prescribe antibiotics if it is determined you have bacterial mastitis. Your breast milk is safe for your baby when you are taking antibiotics for mastitis.

Mastitis does not mean you have to stop breastfeeding or expressing milk for your baby.



The information provided is for information purposes only. If you are a patient using this publication, you should seek assistance from a healthcare professional when interpreting these materials and applying them to your individual circumstances.



## Women and Newborn Health Service

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## Recurrent mastitis

Mastitis will frequently recur when:

- The bacteria are not sensitive to the antibiotics your doctor has prescribed
- The antibiotics are not continued long enough
- The incorrect antibiotic is prescribed
- Breastfeeding is stopped on the affected side
- The initial cause is not identified and corrected.

## Support and follow-up

For individual lactation support, contact the Breastfeeding Centre of WA, on (08) 6458 1844, Monday to Friday, 8am-4pm.

For more helpful information about breastfeeding, scan the QR code.



Australian Breastfeeding Association  
Breastfeeding helpline 1800 686 268  
[www.breastfeeding.asn.au](http://www.breastfeeding.asn.au)

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