Comfort Measures for Postpartum Engorgement of the Breasts

Suggestions

Apply warmth:

- Take a warm shower or tub bath, using massaging and hand expressing to let the milk flow down the drain.
- Wrap your breasts in warm wet washcloths (covered with plastic wrap to keep the warmth in, or use disposable diapers).
- Dip your breasts in a basin of warm water (again, allow the milk to flow out).

Massage:

- Gently massage your breasts and try to release some of the excess milk by squeezing with your hand, compressing your whole breast.
- “Comb” your breasts with your hands.
- Roll a smooth cylinder from your underarm to nipple.
- Compress the areola with your fingers, to soften it so baby can latch on.

Engorgement feels like a crisis, but fortunately, it is only a temporary problem. It usually begins by the third day after birth and resolves within a couple of days.
Feed your baby:
• Wake your baby for feeding every 2 hours if needed.

After nursing:
• Apply cool compresses (use gel-packs made for this purpose, a bag of frozen peas, wet washcloths chilled in the freezer, or cold raw cabbage leaves).
• Wear a bra if it fits well and feels good – don’t wear it if it digs into you and leaves red marks! If you have a stretch bra designed for athletic exercise, try that. Wear it to bed if the pain is keeping you awake at night.
• Wear a protective cover, such as breast shells, to let some of the milk leak out.
• Take a pain reliever like ibuprofen (i.e., Motrin® or Advil®) – this not only relieves pain but also reduces swelling. (While you’re still bleeding from your vagina, avoid aspirin because it can increase bleeding.)

If all else fails:
• Use a hospital-quality electric breast pump to remove the milk.
• If the engorgement is not relieved by these measures within 24 hours, call a lactation consultant, 206-598-4628.

See Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Newborn, pages 449 to 451.