

## **IS IT MASTITIS? BE SURE BEFORE YOU TREAT**

Be reassured that signs and symptoms of mastitis will likely resolve on their own.

Many breastfeeding individuals experience breast fullness or palpate normal lactational glandular tissue and misinterpret this as “clogged ducts”. Lactating breasts can feel “lumpy” and even painful at times. Although this is uncomfortable, it is not abnormal. The low estrogen state of the early postpartum predisposes you to sweating and hot flashes that may mimic fevers. Infection takes a few days to develop. The pain and redness you are experiencing may represent alveolar distention, edema, and inflammation rather than infection.

### **Nurse and/or pump as you would regularly on the infected breast.**

- Overfeeding from the affected breast or “pumping to empty” perpetuates a cycle of hyperlactation and is a major risk factor for worsening tissue edema and inflammation.
- Avoid deep massage of the lactating breast. Deep massage causes increased inflammation, tissue edema (swelling), and microvascular injury. Avoid electric toothbrushes and other commercial vibrating or massaging devices. The most successful massage technique is light sweeping of the skin rather than deep tissue massage.
- Breast compressions during feeds can help baby get more milk but should also be done with firm gentle pressure toward the center of the breast.

### **Decrease inflammation and pain.**

- Ice and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs like Ibuprofen (Advil) or Naproxen (Aleve) can reduce edema and inflammation and provide symptomatic relief. Follow package directions but don't be afraid to use the maximum daily dose for 2-3 days.
- Sunflower or soy lecithin 5–10 g daily by mouth may be taken to reduce inflammation in ducts and emulsify milk.

### **Other things to consider doing.....**

- Rest with your baby close by for 24-48 hours. Avoid running errands or doing things around the house. Your body needs to use your energy for healing. Get the best latch you can, every time you feed. Refer to Jack Newman breastfeeding videos or call us if latches are shallow, painful or your nipples are sore after the first 15-20 seconds of each feed.
- Echinacea root tincture is an excellent ally for any woman with mastitis. It is an immune booster. Use one-half drop per pound of body weight as a single dose. (For a woman who weighs 130 pounds, the dose is 65 drops or two dropperfuls.) The dose is repeated as often as twelve times a day (every 2 hours) until symptoms subside. Continue taking Echinacea twice daily for at least a week after all symptoms have cleared.
- Poke root (*Phytolacca americana*) tincture stimulates lymph gland activity and helps clear mastitis quickly. Poke root is potent and potentially toxic; the effect is cumulative. Use no more than two drops of the tincture daily for maximum 3 days. We can provide this if you are interested in trying it.

- A cold poultice of grated raw potato can draw out the heat of inflammation, localize infection and unblock clogged/inflamed tubes. Grated raw potato is applied directly to the breasts, and covered with a clean cloth. When dry, it is removed and replaced with fresh grated potato.
  - When applying these external remedies, remember that frequent, consistent, short applications work better than one or two lengthy treatments. That is, six or seven treatments of 5-10 minutes each spread over the day will be more effective than one treatment lasting for thirty minutes. If infection is present, discard any plant material and wash the poultice materials after each use so as to prevent the spread of the infection.

We reserve antibiotics for bacterial mastitis. Use of antibiotics for inflammatory mastitis disrupts the breast microbiome and increases the risk of progression to bacterial mastitis. Furthermore, non-selective use of antibiotics promotes development of resistant pathogens. Prophylactic antibiotics have not been shown to be effective in the prevention of mastitis. It should be noted that many antibiotics and antifungal medications have anti-inflammatory properties, and this may explain why women experience relief when taking these.

If you have been doing these things for 48 hours and not seeing any improvement, or if symptoms are worsening, please contact the on-call midwife by pager 250-360-4835.