

MASTITIS

Mastitis is an inflammation of the breast tissue found in lactating women. It may vary in degree from a mild plugged duct to a severe infection or even abscess. The key element to treatment is early recognition and treatment of the problem.

Signs and Symptoms:

- Elevated temperature, fever (mild is 99 degrees; anything above 101 is of concern)
- Increased pulse rate
- Chills, malaise, achey body, headache, nausea and vomiting
- Painful, tender, reddened areas with hard lumps

A tender lumpy area (without other symptoms) is usually the first sign of a problem. This is a *plugged duct* and is the result of milk sitting in one place for too long. It happens when the breast is very full and does not get drained completely. This could be because the fit of the bra is too tight in one spot (often while nursing) or the nipples are sore, so you avoid one side too long. The first side of a problem could also be waking up with flu-like feelings. Many breast infections start this way so it's probably best to assume that's what it is and seek treatment.

Prevention:

First, be aware of the above warning signs. Wear a bra that fits properly or go without one. Make sure to change breast pads frequently to discourage the growth of yeast (thrush in babies). Make sure that you get adequate sleep (take naps with baby!), nutrition and plenty of fluids to keep your immune system in good shape. Regular and frequent nursing on both sides help assist in good milk let down, which can help "wash out" an infection before it starts. If you are having issues with your baby's latch or positioning, please let me know.

Treatment:

Mastitis is very serious and can progress very quickly (because bacteria grow so well in milk!). At the first suspicion of mastitis, go to bed. This may not be necessary for a plugged duct (for a plugged duct, nurse baby frequently, especially on the affected breast to move the milk through). Drink plenty of fluids, eat well and nurse your baby as frequently as you can. Make sure you nurse on both breasts with proper positioning of your baby. Take your temperature every four hours and avoid sugar and processed foods.

You can also do the following:

Vitamin C- no more than 2000mg per day

Echinacea tincture- 1 dropper every 2 hours (alternate with Vitamin C if you have both)

Cabbage leaves- apply cool cabbage leaves directly to affected breast

Antibiotics- from your doctor, should the infection get worse and become an abscess.

Other great resources:

Wise Woman Herbal for the Childbearing Year, by Susun Weed

The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding, La Leche League