

# Breast care after your baby dies: Suggestions to relieve breast discomfort

The time after the death of a baby is physically and emotionally exhausting. Those feelings may be even stronger if you were breastfeeding your baby. Colostrum (early breast milk) is produced as early as 16 weeks into the pregnancy. Even though your baby has died, your breasts will continue to produce milk. Some mothers may experience their milk “coming in” within a few days after delivery, while others may continue the feeling of “let-down” or milk leaking whenever they see or hear another baby cry. These are normal reactions of your body. Caring for your breasts during this time is important. It will help make them more comfortable and reduce the risk of a blocked duct and a breast infection.



*One mother said,  
“I remember that people wanted to hold and hug me, but it was so painful when they pressed against my chest that it brought tears to my eyes!”*

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## **Some moms have found these tips to be helpful during the early days:**

- Wear a comfortable, supportive bra.
- Wear breast pads for leaking, if needed (change damp pads often).
- Apply cold packs (a chilled wash cloth or a bag of frozen peas) to your breasts for 15-20 minutes, as needed during the day for comfort.
- Avoid heat on your breasts, such as a hot compress.
- Ask your doctor about an over-the-counter pain reliever for discomfort and inflammation.
- Express a little breast milk (with a manual pump or hand expression) when breasts feel over-full or uncomfortable, but just enough to relieve discomfort. Too much expressing can make more milk.
- Lean over a warm water bath; allow the breasts to rest in the water and milk to flow out. This will help relieve some pressure and discomfort.
- Continue to drink fluids; limiting them will not affect your milk production.

## How to stop breastfeeding/pumping

If you were breastfeeding or pumping, sudden weaning may be painful. Your breasts may become overfull and engorged, leading to discomfort and possible pain. The pressure of milk inside your milk ducts causes the milk production to stop. The pressure may lead to swelling and lumpy breasts for 3 to 4 days. Call your health care provider if symptoms continue.

You may need to continue pumping for a couple of days to ease the pressure. As you decrease pumping your body will slowly stop making milk. If you get a reddened area on your breast with pain, swelling, and flu-like symptoms with a fever, call your health care provider. You may have an infection in your breast (mastitis).

For more information or support, contact your local hospital lactation department or your health care provider.

## Milk Donation

Some bereaved mothers donate their milk to a milk bank for a period of time. Donating milk to save another baby's life may help with emotional healing. A Lactation Consultant will assist you with this process if you wish. All expenses are paid by the receiving milk bank. For more information on donating your milk, please contact:

Mothers' Milk Bank of New England

Office phone: 617-527-6263

### Reference

J. Lauwers, A. Swisher. *Counseling the Nursing Mother*. 4<sup>th</sup> edition. Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett Publishers; 2005.

