

Breast care when your baby has died

The time after the death of a baby can be physically and emotionally exhausting.

Colostrum (early breastmilk) is produced as early as 16 weeks into the pregnancy. Even when your baby has died, your breasts will make milk. Some women welcome this as proof their baby was real while other women find the reminder very painful. Caring for your breasts is important, as it will help make them more comfortable and reduce the risk of blocked ducts and mastitis.

Medication (Dostinex – cabergoline) to suppress breastmilk can be ordered by your doctor, but needs to be given within 24 hours of the birth.

AS BREASTS BECOME UNCOMFORTABLE

- ▶ A comfortable, supportive bra and breast pads may be useful.
- ▶ Apply cold packs and change often (e.g. chilled washers or a bag of frozen peas). Washed cabbage leaves can also be used.
- ▶ Avoid heat on your breasts.
- ▶ Take paracetamol as directed to relieve pain and discomfort.
- ▶ Express enough milk to relieve fullness and keep breasts comfortable. This does not increase your supply because you are not emptying the breasts.

It may be necessary to continue expressing for several days to help prevent the pain of sudden engorgement or mastitis.



IF YOUR MILK SUPPLY IS ESTABLISHED AND YOUR BABY DIES

Gradually decrease over several days the number of times you express and the amount of milk removed from your breasts while still maintaining breast comfort. This is particularly important for any mother who has been expressing with a pump for more than two weeks.

Depending on your circumstances, this could take place either in hospital or at home.

Restricting fluids is no longer recommended.

If you are unsure about your particular situation seek the guidance of a healthcare professional or an Australian Breastfeeding Association counsellor.

THINGS TO WATCH FOR

Engorgement

Breasts become swollen, hard and painful. If this happens express your breasts completely **once** to relieve the pain. Over the next several days express enough milk to keep your breasts comfortable, apply cold packs or washed cabbage leaves, avoid heat and take paracetamol to increase comfort.

Mementos

Some mothers may like to freeze a small amount of breastmilk as a memento.

How long will I have milk?

It may take some weeks (or even longer) for your milk to disappear completely. If you are unsure, talk with your midwife or doctor.

Leakage may still take place for some time after the discomfort has settled.

THE DAY OF THE FUNERAL

This will be a long and emotional day. These hints may help:

- ▶ Express milk for comfort before the funeral and during the day as needed.
- ▶ Your breasts may leak milk, so be prepared with breast pads and have some spare.
- ▶ Wear your bra comfortably firm but NOT tight.
- ▶ Dark-coloured or patterned tops are less likely to show wet patches.
- ▶ A cardigan or jacket may help hide wet spots.
- ▶ Paracetamol taken as directed will help ease breast pain.

Time is not a factor in the grieving process. After the loss of your precious baby, feelings of grief and sadness may come and go as you try to move on with your life. Family and friends will want to show they care even though they may not understand exactly how you feel.

It may be helpful to speak with others who have lost a child (e.g. SIDSandKIDS) or you may wish to contact a grief counsellor or counselling service (e.g. NALAG - National Association for Loss and Grief).

Contacts

- ▶ For **Early Childhood Centres** look under Community Health Services in telephone book.
- ▶ For your closest **Maternity Unit** look under Hospitals in telephone book.
- ▶ **Australian Breastfeeding Association Helpline**
Ph: 1800 686 2 686, (i.e. 1800 mum 2 mum)
7 days a week
www.breastfeeding.asn.au
- ▶ **MotherSafe**
(Medications in Pregnancy & Lactation Service)
Ph: 02 9382 6539 or 1800 647 848 for callers outside the Sydney Metropolitan area.
- ▶ After hours telephone advice lines are listed in or on the back cover of your baby's *Personal Health Record* (Blue Book).
- ▶ **SIDSandKIDS**
Ph: 02 9818 8400
24 Hour Bereavement Support
Ph: 1800 651 186
- ▶ **NALAG** (National Association for Loss and Grief)
Ph: 02 6882 9222

References

Australian Breastfeeding Association 2006. Breastfeeding ... naturally, p 186-187.