

A nipple shield is a thin flexible silicone cover that is placed over the nipple to assist with breastfeeding. It may be helpful when your baby is not maintaining an effective attachment to your breast due to inverted nipples, prematurity, or other reasons. Nipple shields may also be used when breastfeeding is difficult due to nipple pain and/or nipple damage. Nipple pain and damage are usually caused by incorrect attachment, therefore, if you are using the shield due to nipple pain/damage it is important to focus on correcting your breastfeeding technique prior to starting a nipple shield.

It is important to get support from your midwife, lactation consultant, or child and family health nurse when using a nipple shield to ensure breastfeeding with the nipple shield is working well.

Nipple shields come in different sizes. Large nipple shields (size 24) are appropriate for most women, medium nipple shields (size 20) may be appropriate for premature babies or women with very small nipples. Some nipple shields have one or two cut-out sections; these can be placed at baby's nose.

Nipple shields are not recommended in the first few days after birth as colostrum does not transfer easily through a nipple shield. They are more effective when your milk volume starts to increase around the 3rd to 4th day after birth. If baby is not attaching well in the first few days, keeping baby skin-to-skin during and between breastfeeds, and encouraging baby to lick expressed colostrum off the breast may help baby to attach.

You might only need to use a nipple shield for a short period of time. Your nipple may lengthen over time and you, and your baby will also become better at breastfeeding.

Occasionally, some women need to use a nipple shield for a longer period of time. It is fine to continue to use the nipple shield if you and your baby are happy and breastfeeding is going well.

How to use a nipple shield

- It can be useful to express a small amount of milk into the nipple shield or onto the outside of the nipple shield.
- Partially invert the nipple shield, centre the shield over your nipple, and then roll the edges of the shield on to your breast. This creates a small amount of suction and draws your nipple into the shield. The shield should be stable and not slip up and down. You can use a few drops of expressed milk to help the shield stick to your breast.
- Sit so you and your baby are facing each other with your baby's chest close to your breast or body. Support your breast keeping your fingers off the nipple shield to give your baby plenty of room to attach. Touch the nipple shield onto baby's top lip, wait for the moment when your baby opens their mouth wide, and then bring your baby to your breast.
- A good attachment to the breast with a nipple shield should look like your baby is feeding straight from the breast, as if the shield is not there. Baby's chin and cheeks should be touching your breast (or the shield against your breast). Ensure that your baby's mouth is wide around the nipple shield and that their lips are not on the teat part of the nipple shield. Your baby's mouth should not be sliding up and down on the shaft of the shield. Baby's body stays tucked in close to your body during the whole feed.

It is important to check for milk transfer during breastfeeding. Look for initial fast sucking and a change to slower deeper rhythmic sucking as your milk starts to flow, listen for regular swallows, feel your breasts directly before and after a feed to see if they feel softer after the feed (this may only be obvious in the early weeks), and look to check there is milk in the shield after the feed.

- If you think that your baby did not feed well, or you are concerned about the milk transfer through the shield, you may need to hand express or use a breast pump to obtain more milk and give this milk to baby with a spoon, bottle or a cup.

Cleaning the nipple shield

Between each use wash the nipple shield in warm, soapy water. Force water through the holes to remove milk residue. Rinse well. Dry thoroughly with a clean and dry paper towel and place in a clean, dry container with a lid.

Transitioning to direct breastfeeding

- When you decide to try feeding baby without the nipple shield: choose a time of day when both you and baby are relaxed; attach your baby as you have been doing using the shield; feed for a short time (a few minutes), wait for good, strong sucking; quickly remove baby from the breast, remove the shield and try to attach baby directly onto your breast. This may take several attempts. Alternatively breastfeed on the first side with the shield and try attaching baby on the second side without the shield. Success may take some time and patience. If you or your baby gets upset, try again later.
- Seek help from your child and family health nurse, midwife, or lactation consultant to help you transition to direct breastfeeding.

Resources

- Your Midwife, Child and Family Health Nurse, or Lactation Consultant
- Australian Breastfeeding Association www.breastfeeding.asn.au Helpline: 1800 686 268.
- Raising Children Network www.Raisingchildren.net.au
- Global Health Media Videos: www.globalhealthmedia.org
- Australian Infant Feeding Guidelines (2012) www.eatforhealth.gov.au
- If you need an interpreter, please call Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on 131 450