



Postnatal Physiotherapy

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Therapy**

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Managing Mastitis Info Sheet

A painful, extremely common issue for mums in the postpartum period, we treat Mastitis like a medical emergency because we know that if left untreated—things can escalate quickly. This page will assist in identifying symptoms, provide you with at home relief and support should you think you have Mastitis.

What is Mastitis?

Mastitis (or Lactational Mastitis) is a medical condition that can occur either as a result of a blocked milk duct or from engorgement (compression of the tissue leading to milk leaching out into the breast tissue) and results in inflammation of the breast, in some cases leading to infection.

Often a result of tight clothing, changes to feeding style, missed feeds, pressure on the breasts or engorgement (i.e. when the breast tissue overfills with milk, blood and other fluids), Mastitis isn't always preventable but can be treated if you catch the symptoms and warning signs early.



Step 1: Recognising the Symptoms

The symptoms of Mastitis can come on very suddenly & be tricky to spot. You may feel like you're getting the flu before you feel any discomfort in your breast.

Knowing what to look for is key to catching Mastitis early.

Symptoms include but are not limited to:

- Shivers & aches, similar to early onset flu symptoms
 - Breast tenderness or warmth to the touch
 - Shiny or red streaks on skin of breast tissue
 - Sense of unease and illness - Feeling 'off'
- Thickening of breast tissue, or a breast lump
 - Discomfort or nipple discharge
 - Breast swelling

If a firm and sore lump appears in your breast but you otherwise feel well, you probably have a blocked milk duct.

If you have an inflamed, sore, swollen, or red breast you may have Mastitis. If Mastitis isn't treated quickly, a build-up can occur and a breast abscess can form so it's important to act quickly.

If you think you have a blocked duct or Mastitis, try the below tips straight away to ease the problem, but don't hesitate to contact us and seek treatment if you can't clear it on your own within 24 hours.

Step 2: Start With the Basics

Get some advice early

If you have a pre or postnatal physiotherapist already on board, then check in with them as early intervention can make or break your recovery.

Rest as much as possible

Try to get some extra rest. Ask your partner, family, or friends for help with household tasks.

Wear loose clothing

Avoid restrictive clothing, in particular overly tight or compressive bras. We highly recommend soft-bralettes or going bra-less.

Continue to breastfeed

Breastfeed as often as your baby needs (normally 8 to 12 times in 24 hours for a new baby), or at a minimum of every 3-4 hours from the affected breast while you're clearing your symptoms.

Don't miss or put off breastfeeds

We know it can be painful, but it's important not to skip feeds. Wake your baby for a feed if your breasts become too full. If your baby doesn't want to feed you may need to express a small amount of milk.

Empty the breast before changing sides

Encourage complete emptying of breast before changing sides by ensuring you:

- Feed for as long as you can on first side
- If you think your baby has emptied the first side, check your breast feels soft all the way around before offering the second side (If not, re-attach the baby and help them drain the rest of the breast).

Try to keep calm

Don't panic yourself and fall down a google rabbit hole! If you would like to learn more about Mastitis and treatment options

Step 3: Treatment At Home

The next step is to attempt to clear the blocked duct yourself, by following this easy-to-follow at-home regimen.

Heat Pack

Before you feed you can start to help your milk flow by placing a heat pack or warm cloths on the sore area of your breast. If your milk is flowing easily then warm packs are not needed.

Massage

Next, confidently begin to massage the breast in a direction towards your nipple to start the milk flow. Use a firm but comfortable pressure, with sweeping strokes especially over the affected area. The aim is to see milk flow from the nipple with ease when you stroke over the affected area towards the nipple.

Empty the Breast

Once the milk is flowing, it's time to feed or express until the breast is completely empty.

Check the Breast

Feel for firm spots throughout the breast tissue, if you can still feel areas of firmness it might be worth massaging over them again with sweeping strokes towards the nipple until they soften.

Post-feed Massage

Following your feed, we recommend performing a massage to help your lymphatic system drain more effectively. This will assist with shifting away milk sitting within the breast tissue.

With similar techniques as before, use cupping and sweeping massaging strokes over the whole breast towards the armpit for 5 minutes.

Cool Packs

Ease your pain, if needed, by placing a cool pack, such as a packet of frozen peas wrapped in a cloth, on the breast after feeding or expressing.

Rest and Relax

Now relax. Enjoy some time with your little one until it's time to feed again. On your next feed repeat the whole process, you'll be likely to do this every feed over a 24 hour period, or until symptoms resolve.