

Mastitis in the Lactating Breast

What Is Mastitis?

Mastitis is inflammation of the milk ducts. The inflammation is the result of milk flowing backwards through the ducts and into the breast tissue. This is due to an increase in pressure in the milk ducts. Breast milk contains protein. When the milk enters the breast tissue, the protein is recognized as “foreign” and creates an inflammatory response in this tissue.

Mastitis is generally not an infective condition, but is often treated as an infection as they have similar signs and symptoms. The only way to determine if mastitis is infective is to take a milk culture.

Milk ducts are very easily squashed and a duct may become blocked due to the pressure from the swelling in the surrounding tissues.

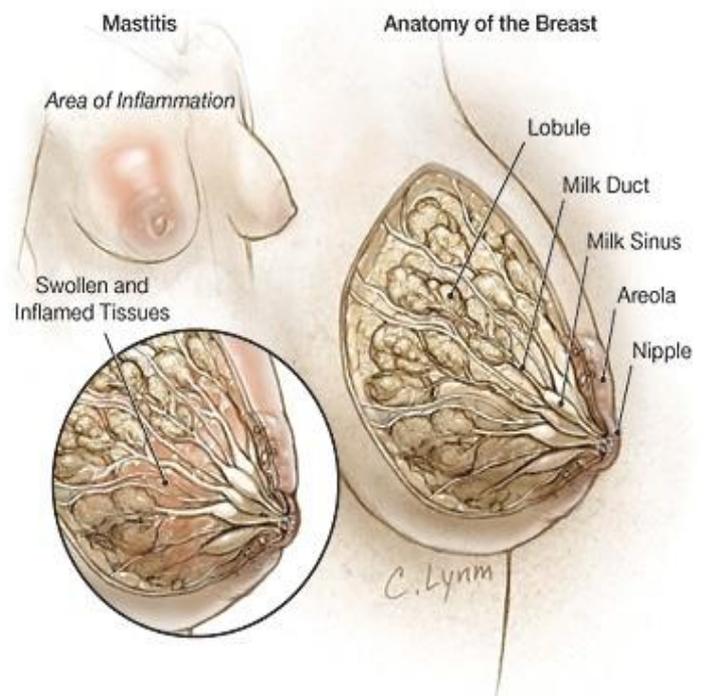
Signs and symptoms of mastitis

- Pain
- Swelling
- Redness
- Fever
- Fatigue and generally feeling unwell

*these are all the signs of inflammation and infection

Most common causes of mastitis

- Interrupted or erratic feeding patterns
- Sudden changes in the infants feeds
- e.g. infant sleeps longer overnight
- Skipping feeds
- Suckling replaced by bottles or pacifiers
- Finger compression
- Tight garments, bras
- Sleeping on your stomach



Treatment: (Rest, ice, garments, massage and ultrasound)

Rest

- Rest is essential for your recovery and to prevent a reoccurrence of mastitis. You need to imagine that you are still pregnant and you need to minimise any activity that you do. This includes household chores, cooking, shopping and having lots of visitors. You need rest on the couch or in bed, with your feet elevated as this will help your pelvic floor recovery as well. You will need to rest for at 4-5 days.

Cold/ice packs

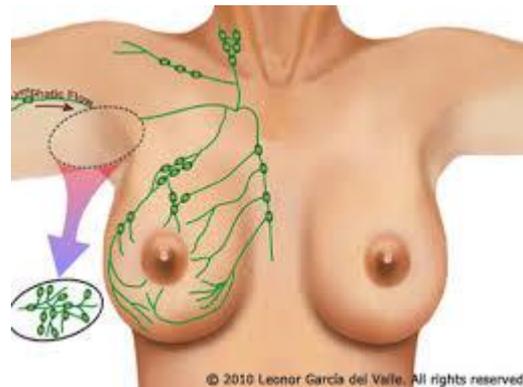
- Using a cold or ice pack can help to reduce pain and inflammation in the breast. You can use the cold/ice pack for 10-15 minutes every 1-2 hours.

Avoid wearing tight bras, tops or breast pads

- These can potentially compress the milk ducts in the breast and cause milk to leak into the surrounding tissue. If you remove your bra there should be no red marks or indentations in your skin or breast. Try wearing a bigger bra or maternity singlet.

Massage / ultrasound

- Massage and ultrasound can help remove the inflammation from the breast tissue. Your Physio will show you how to perform the correct massage technique. At no time should anything you do to your breast cause you any pain or discomfort.



FAQ's

Can I still feed off my affected breast? The answer is yes, provided that you have no pain whilst feeding and the baby is not fussing over the breast. If the baby is fussing over the breast or it is painful to feed, then do not worry about feeding off the breast for the next feed. After your visit with the Physiotherapist and after the lactation ultrasound treatment you should find that the baby feeds more readily off the breast and there should be less pain. Our ultimate goal after Physiotherapy treatment is to get the baby back on the breast as soon as possible.

Should I express in between feeds? There is no research to support that expressing more frequently will resolve mastitis more quickly.

What does the ultrasound treatment do? Ultrasound treatment for mastitis helps to reduce tissue inflammation, promote healing and reduce pain, and it accelerates the healing of the breast.

When should I make a Physiotherapy appointment? As soon as you start to notice any changes in your breast, e.g. pain, swelling, redness, you should make an appointment, the same day is preferable. If treated early mastitis can usually be resolved quickly and your breastfeeding can return to pain free normal function.