



York Teaching Hospital  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Lactation after baby loss

Information for patients

① For more information, please contact:

**Maternity Services**

Please see our contact details on page 11

Caring with Pride



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## Introduction

We are very sorry that your baby has sadly died. One of the most distressing physical symptoms following the death of your baby can be breast pain and the production of breast milk.

The aim of this leaflet is to provide you with information on how to reduce and stop the production of breast milk. It offers practical advice to ease the physical symptoms of breast engorgement that you may experience during this difficult and emotional time.

## Natural Milk Production

The amount of milk produced in the breast will vary from person to person, and will reduce naturally over a period of time. If breastfeeding has already been established, your breasts may continue to produce milk for some time.

It is extremely important not to abruptly stop the production of milk if breastfeeding has already established, as this may increase the risk of severe breast engorgement and mastitis.

## What is engorgement?

Engorgement is when the breasts become swollen, firm, and painful. It can happen between 2-5 days after giving birth to a stillborn baby or sooner if you have started to lactate (i.e. if you have been either breastfeeding or expressing milk for a poorly baby). Your breasts can leak milk and feel uncomfortable for up to 7-14 days. This can settle down on its own. If severely engorged, your breasts can become hard, shiny, warm, and slightly lumpy to touch. Breast engorgement actually helps to suppress the production of breast milk. However, painful breast engorgement is not necessary and can be avoided.

## What is Mastitis?

Mastitis is inflammation of the breast, which, if left untreated, can develop into a more serious infection.

Symptoms include:

- Red, swollen area on the breast that is hot and painful to touch.
- Breast lump or area of hardness on the breast.
- White or blood stained nipple discharge.
- Flu-like symptoms including fatigue, chills, fever.

If you display any of these symptoms, it is recommended that you contact your midwife or GP as antibiotic treatment may be required.

## How can I relieve the symptoms of Engorgement?

A variety of methods can be used to reduce milk production including prescribed medication and a milk reduction routine. These are a few suggestions to help relieve engorgement.

- Take regular pain relief
- Wear a support bra all the time
- Use breast pads to absorb leaking milk
- Use cold compresses or gel packs on the breasts
- If your breasts feel very full, hand express a small amount of milk for comfort
- Apply washed and chilled savoy cabbage leaves to the breasts
- Have a warm bath or shower to allow the breasts to leak naturally (ensure shower water jets are not directly on the breasts)
- Sleep in a semi upright position to avoid pressure from heavy breasts

## How do I hand express?

To hand express, hold your breast with your fingers a few inches back from the areola (the dark part around the nipple). Push your hand back towards the chest wall, and then roll your fingers forward toward the nipple, taking care not to slide your fingers over the skin.

## How do I reduce my milk supply?

If you were breastfeeding or expressing regularly for a premature or ill baby, you will need to reduce gradually the amount of breast milk produced. This can be done through increasing the time between expressing by hand or pump, over a few days until you can eventually stop. We would suggest the following:

**Day 1** Pump each breast for 5 minutes every 4-5 hours;

**Day 2** Pump each breast for 3-5 minutes every 6 hours;

**Day 3** Pump each breast just long enough to relieve discomfort.



## Can I take any medication to help?

Cabergoline prevents/suppresses milk production by blocking the hormone that is secreted to produce milk. It should be used alongside a milk reduction routine. However, a small proportion of women may experience side effects such as nausea, vomiting, and headaches.

The dose of Cabergoline for prevention of milk production is 1mg but this must be taken within the first 72 hours of the birth of the baby.

For suppression of milk production that has already been established, the dose is 0.25mg twice a day for two days. Your midwife or GP may be able to arrange this.

## Can I donate my milk to the milk bank?

Not every woman wants to stop lactating at this difficult time. There is the option of donating your milk to the UK National Milk Bank for it to be used to treat premature and sick babies.

Contact [www.ukamb.org](http://www.ukamb.org) for more information.

York hospital uses the local Chester milk bank. If you would like to donate your breast milk, please contact [www.northwesthmb.org.uk/donate/donationafterloss/](http://www.northwesthmb.org.uk/donate/donationafterloss/)

## Baby's funeral

Around the time of your baby's funeral is going to be highly emotional. This unfortunately can affect your milk production and you may experience engorgement even though you thought things were settling down. If possible, sit down and support your breasts with your arm. Let people know not to hug you too hard if your breasts are painful.

## Can I get any emotional support?

It is important that you are supported through your bereavement.

The hospital booklet "Information to help you following the loss of your baby" is available from bereavement services. If you have not received this, please contact them or your midwife/nurse to obtain a copy.

The following pages will give you the hospital contact details that you may find useful, along with both local and national bereavement support charities.

## Useful telephone numbers

Patient Advice and Liaison  
Service (PALS) 01904 726262

Infant Feeding Co-ordinator 07766 498290

### **The York Hospital Site Contacts**

Bereavement Services 01904 725445

Community Midwives, contact via  
Maternity Medical Records during  
Office hours 01904 726720

Bereavement Midwife Support  
(Wednesday/Friday) 01904 725445

Chaplaincy  
(Office hours/voicemail) 01904 725579

Special care baby unit (SCBU) 01904 726005

### **Scarborough Hospital Site Contacts**

Switch board 01723 368111

Bereavement Services 01723 385178

Bereavement Midwife Support  
(Thursday) 01723 385178

Chaplaincy 01723 342500

## National Support Organisations

### **BLISS the premature baby charity**

Support, advice and information for families of babies in intensive care and special care, including bereaved families.

[www.bliss.org.uk](http://www.bliss.org.uk)

Telephone: 020 7378 1122

Email support service

[hello@bliss.org.uk](mailto:hello@bliss.org.uk)

### **The Child Bereavement charity**

The charity provides support and information to all affected by the death of a baby or child.

[www.childbereavement.org.uk](http://www.childbereavement.org.uk)

Helpline: 0800 02 888 40

### **Twins and Births Association (TAMBA)**

Bereavement Support Group

For parents who have lost one or both twins or more from multiple birth.

<https://www.tamba.org.uk>

Helpline: 01252 332 344

### **Edwards Trust Sunrise**

Supports children and families through serious illness and bereavement.

[www.edwardstrust.org.uk](http://www.edwardstrust.org.uk)

Telephone: 0121 454 1705



## Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact: [BereavementServices@york.nhs.uk](mailto:BereavementServices@york.nhs.uk) or via the contact details on page 11.

## Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

## Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email [pals@york.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@york.nhs.uk).

An answer phone is available out of hours.



Please telephone or email if you  
require this information in a different  
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