



TEN STEP TUESDAY

# Breast Care for the Non-Breastfeeding Patient

## It's Ten Step Tuesday!

### What should a formula-feeding patient know about breast care?

- Whether or not you choose to, your body will still prepare for breastfeeding. The delivery of baby and the placenta creates a hormonal shift that begins the process of milk production.
- Between 2 and 5 days after delivery, expect your breasts to become more full as your milk volumes increase. You may experience engorgement, which is when your breasts become swollen (sometimes rock-hard) and painful. Engorgement usually goes away on its own, but occasionally, it can lead to plugged milk ducts or mastitis.
- Milk production is driven by supply and demand. The amount of milk produced depends on how much you breastfeed or express milk. If you do not breastfeed or express milk, your milk will dry up on its own, usually within 7-10 days.

### What can a formula-feeding parent do to ease the discomfort of engorgement?

- Wear a supportive bra or sports bra. Do not “bind” your breasts or wear a bra that’s too tight, which can lead to more pain and potentially plugged ducts or mastitis.
- Apply ice packs or cold compresses to the breasts for 15 minutes every hour to reduce swelling. Wrap the ice pack in a thin cloth to protect your skin. Pro tip: make your own ice packs using clean disposable newborn diapers. Just pour clean water on the diaper, freeze, and place in your bra.
- Take pain medication, like ibuprofen, as needed to help with inflammation.
- Express milk just a bit by hand if you’re feeling very uncomfortable, but only enough to soften the breasts. The more you express, the more milk you will produce, and the longer it will take for your milk to dry up.
- Consider applying cold cabbage leaves to help reduce pain and swelling. Evidence is mixed, but it is inexpensive and considered safe.

Continue this care until your breasts are soft. And most importantly, call your doctor if you have painful, warm lumps in your breast, feel tired and achy, or have a temperature over 100 degrees.

For more information contact

Cara Gerhardt, BSN RN IBCLC, [coordinator@high5kansas.org](mailto:coordinator@high5kansas.org)