

# What is mastitis and what can I do about it?

## What is mastitis?

Mastitis is an infection of the breast tissue, the milk ducts or both.

## How do I know I have it?

- One or both breasts feel firm, swollen, hot, and sore with redness or red streaking.
- You have a fever over 38° celsius.
- You suddenly feel sick with chills and aches, like you are getting the flu.

## What should I do if I think I have it?

- Speak to your doctor or midwife.
- You can also speak to your baby's nurse, community health nurse, lactation consultant or call a nurse at HealthLink by phoning 811.
- Keep feeding your baby. Your milk is safe to give.

## How is it treated?

- Empty your breasts often by breastfeeding or pumping. Breastfeed or pump every 2 to 3 hours. Try to completely empty each breast.
- Your doctor may order antibiotics.
- Rest. Rest is very important to treat mastitis.

## What are some helpful hints?

- Using moist heat on your breast may help. Have a warm shower or get into a tub of warm water to encourage the milk to flow.

- If possible, gently massage above and then over the tender area moving towards the nipple. It may be too sore.
- Try a combination of hand expressing, single and double pumping, especially if it is too painful to breastfeed.
- Finish with hand expression until milk stops flowing and the breasts are soft.
- If pain blocks the milk from flowing and mastitis is in one breast, express on the other side first, and then double pump both breasts as soon as your milk starts flowing.
- Some mothers find cold such as gel packs or ice help decrease swelling.
- Keep giving your milk to your baby. Your breast milk is safe for your baby even if you are taking antibiotics and pain relievers.

## How do I prevent mastitis from happening again?

- The most important thing to do is to keep your breasts well emptied.
- Learn how to hand express, so you can remove the milk at times when you are not able to pump when needed.

### **Remember:**

- **Emptying your breasts, either by breastfeeding your baby or pumping, helps treat mastitis.**
- **Your milk is safe for your baby.**

**It's Good to Ask!**