

# Using a Nipple Shield

## What is a nipple shield?

A nipple shield is a nipple-shaped covering worn over the nipple during breastfeeding to help a baby feed.



Nipple shields can be purchased at BCWomen's gift shop or at most major drug stores.

## When to use a nipple shield

### First, try:

- Spending time with your diapered baby nuzzled against your bare skin ("skin-to-skin care")
- Cuddling your baby and giving your baby lots of chances to latch and breastfeed.

If your baby is still having trouble latching or feeding well, ask your nurse or lactation consultant about using a nipple shield. A shield may be useful:

- If you have flat or inverted nipples
- If your baby is premature or sick, has trouble latching, trouble staying latched during feedings, or has trouble feeding well.

## Getting the right fit

Choose the shield that works for you and your baby. Nipple shields come in three sizes:

Small (16mm), medium (20mm), and large (24mm).

Consider the following when deciding which nipple shield to use:

- The size of your baby (e.g. the 16 and 20mm shields are often used with smaller babies)
- The size of your nipples (e.g. larger nipples will not fit into the small nipple shield).

## How to use a nipple shield

Here are some tips for using a nipple shield:

- Learn how to tell if your baby is ready to start feeding (refer to "your baby's feeding cues").
- Place the shield in hot water for 2 to 3 minutes before using. This may help make the nipple shield more flexible and easier to stick to your breast.
- If there is a cut-out section of the shield, place this section over the area of your breast where your baby's nose will be.
- When centering the shield onto your nipple, press the base of the nipple part of the shield against your breast. This may help draw your nipple into the shield.
- Express a few drops of milk into the nipple part of the shield or onto the shield. The smell of the breast milk may encourage your baby to latch onto the nipple.
- Stroke your baby's mouth with the tip of the shield to encourage your baby to open his or her mouth.
- Bring your baby in as close as possible to help them to latch as far onto your breast as possible – not just on to the tip of the shield.



Learn more about your baby's feeding cues by watching a video at:

<https://www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca/home/articles/video-about-baby-feeding-cues-and-behaviours>

## How to know your baby is getting milk

If you are using a nipple shield, you can tell if your baby is getting milk if:

- You see milk in the nipple shield
- You hear sucking and swallowing
- Your baby is content after a feeding
- Your baby is gaining weight
  - Weigh your baby before and after each feeding to measure how much milk they are getting.
- Your baby has the expected number of wet diapers and bowel movements each day.

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For more signs of a good feeding, go to:  
<http://www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca/home/articles/signs-good-feed>

Your milk supply may decrease if you are using a nipple shield over a longer period of time. Try to:

- Hand express or pump after each feeding to maintain your milk supply as long as a shield is used.
- Check your baby's weight at least every 1 to 2 weeks to make sure they are getting enough milk.



Learn more about other feeding methods by watching the video at:

<https://www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca/home/articles/video-alternative-feeding-methods-newborns>

## How to clean the nipple shield

1. Rinse the remaining milk from the shield with water.
2. Wash the shield with hot, soapy water. Rinse well.
3. Let the shield air dry.
4. Store the shield in a clean container or zip lock bag.

## Do you have questions or need help with feeding your baby?

**IN HOSPITAL:** ask your nurse or contact the lactation consultant.

**AT HOME:** see your doctor, nurse, or midwife/public health in the community.

## Weaning your baby off the nipple shield

Once your baby is feeding well with the shield, it is a good idea to work towards getting them directly onto your breast. Some strategies that may help include:

- Put your baby skin-to-skin often.
- Roll your nipples with your fingers or pump briefly to bring your nipples out (erect) before offering your baby your breast.
- Express milk onto your nipples to entice your baby onto your breast before using the shield.
- Try feeding your baby without the nipple shield while they are drowsy or just waking up.
- Start your baby on the shield for a few minutes and then slip the shield off and try without it.
- Keep trying; gradually, with time, most babies can directly breastfeed.

## If you and your baby are in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU)

NICU nurses can help assess your baby's need for milk top-ups through a feeding tube. This is based on:

- Your perception of how empty your breasts are after feeding
- Your baby's fullness cues (e.g. falling asleep after a feeding, becoming increasingly drowsy, stopping sucking, and pushing away from your breast)
- The length of time your baby is sucking at your breast