

Using a nipple shield

Information for patients and carers

What is a nipple shield?

A nipple shield is a soft silicone cover designed to be placed over the nipples while breastfeeding. In some situations, the use of a nipple shield can assist with breastfeeding.

Nipple shields should only be used with the guidance of a health professional such as a Midwife or Nurse, Lactation Consultant, Maternal and Child Health Nurse or Doctor

When is a nipple shield used?

There are some situations where a nipple shield might be useful e.g.

- Your baby is having problems attaching to your breast e.g. if you have flat or inverted nipples.
- You are experiencing nipple pain or damage that has not responded to correct positioning and attachment.
- You have psoriasis or eczema on your nipples which causes pain during feeding.

Nipple shields should normally not be used until your milk has come-in.

Before this time your breasts are producing colostrum which is thick and sticky and doesn't flow easily through a nipple shield. If your baby is unable to breastfeed before 48 hours, you can give expressed breastmilk to your baby by finger feeding, spoon, or cup.



How do I use a nipple shield?

- Wash and dry your hands before use.
- Express a few drops of milk to start the milk flowing. Smear some milk onto the shield to help it stay in place.
- There are different ways to attach the shield so choose which works for you.
 - Stretch the shield out and place the centre over your nipple, then press against your breast.
 - Invert the pointy part of the shield and place over your nipple then 'flick' the wings back over your breast.
- Place the cut-out part of the shield where your baby's nose will be, so the nose is touching your skin instead of the silicone
- Ensure that your nipple is centrally positioned so your nipple is not pinched or rubbed.
- Hold the shield in place with your thumb and finger spread widely over the edges.
- Expressing a small amount of milk into the shield first may encourage your baby to suck.
- Encourage your baby to open widely by brushing your baby's lips with the shield. When your baby opens wide, bring your baby quickly to your breast.
 - Your baby's lips should be pressed up against the shield where it touches your breast.
 - Your baby's cheeks should be touching your breast.
 - The shield should not be slipping or sliding back and forward in your baby's mouth.
 - Your baby should not be just sucking on the tip of the shield.
 - As your baby sucks, listen and look for swallowing.
 - When your baby releases your breast, check that you can see milk in the shield.

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Nipple shield sizing

- Nipple shields come in different sizes; the medium size is suitable for most women.
- When the shield is placed onto your breast your nipple should fit easily into the shield without being pinched or squashed.
- Different brands are available at most pharmacies so if one type does not suit, try a different size, shape or brand.

When can I stop using the shield?

Nipple shields are recommended for short-term use; from a few days to a few weeks. Some women may need to use a shield for longer. A Lactation Consultant, Breastfeeding Counsellor or your Maternal and Child Health Nurse can help you decide when to stop using the shield.

Breastfeeding without the shield

Start a feed with the shield, then remove it after a few minutes and try to re-attach your baby to your breast. Or you can try attaching your baby without the shield at the start of the feed.

If your baby can't attach after a minute or two, use the shield and try again later. Keep trying and be patient: it can take a few weeks to completely stop using the shield. Ask for help if needed.

Cleaning and storing your nipple shield

- After each use rinse the shield in cold water, then wash in hot soapy water, rinse well, dry and store in a clean dry airtight container.
- If you or your baby have a thrush infection, then after washing, boil the shield once a day for 3 minutes, rinse, dry and store as above.

What else should I know about?

Milk supply and milk flow

Milk supply is not usually affected if the shield is used correctly, and for a short time. (e.g. a few days or weeks)

The milk flow may be slightly slower when you use a nipple shield, so some feeds might take a little longer.

Breast compression during feeds (gently pressing on your breast with your hand) may help your milk flow.

If your breasts still feel quite full after feeds, express a small amount of milk for comfort.

Nipple damage

Nipple damage may occur if the nipple shield is not the correct size or is used incorrectly. Nipple infections such as thrush may occur if the shield is not cleaned well.

Baby's sucking action

Use of a shield may change a baby's sucking action and may make it difficult for some babies to return to direct breastfeeding. This is unlikely if the shield is only used for a short time and with health professional support.

Useful contacts:

The Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) 24 hour helpline

Ph. 1800 686 268
www.breastfeeding.asn.au

Ballarat Health Service Breastfeeding Clinic Ph. 0439981987

Parent Place Breastfeeding Support Cnr. Sturt and Albert Streets, Ballarat Central Ph. 0439981987

Ballarat Health Service Maternity Unit Ph. 53204971

24 Hour Maternal and Child Health Advice Line Ph. 132229.