Caring for Your Breasts

In the 3 to 5 days after delivery, your breasts will fill with milk, and they may leak. Your breasts can also become tender or sore. When they overfill with milk, your breasts may become firm and hard. This is known as engorgement. Daily care of your breasts will help ease discomfort and keep your breasts healthy.

Daily breast care steps

- Wash your hands before and after touching your breasts.
- Wear a well-fitting support bra day and night for the first 2 to 3 weeks, if you choose. Do not wear a bra that has under wire.
- Breast pads, worn inside your bra, will help absorb the milk leaking from your breasts. Change the breast pads often.
- If you are breastfeeding:
  - Wearing a nursing bra may add to your comfort.
  - Gently massage your breasts to get the milk flowing. Nurse your baby or pump your breasts at least 8 to 12 times a day until your breast are softer and used to breastfeed on demand.
  - Use ice packs to relieve swelling and slow milk production between feedings for 20 minutes at a time, if desired. Take pain medicines as directed by your health care provider.
  - If you are breastfeeding, having overfilled or engorged breasts can cause other problems. Call the Breastfeeding Help line at 614-293-8910 for more information. Our outpatient lactation specialists will help you.
- If you are not breastfeeding:
  - Avoid long, hot showers or baths. Warmth opens the milk ducts, letting milk flow. It also brings an extra supply of blood and lymphatic fluids to the breast which can lead to swelling.
  - Do not try to pump, massage, or hand express milk. Touching your breasts will help produce milk.
  - Use ice packs to help relieve discomfort for 20 minutes at a time.
  - Take pain medicines as directed by your health care provider.
  - Wear a well-fitting support bra day and night until engorgement goes away, if desired.
When to call your health care provider

Call your health care provider right away if you have these signs of a breast infection. A breast infection needs immediate attention and treatment.

• Breasts are painful.
• Breasts are hard with red streaks.
• You have flu-like symptoms.
• You have a fever of 100.5 degrees F or 38 degrees C or higher.