



## **Natural Treatments for Painful Mastitis: From One Mom To Another**

By Dr. Laurinda Kwan

If your experience was anything like mine, there was a bit of a learning curve with breastfeeding. Despite what seems to be a natural process, *proper* breastfeeding technique is not instinctual when mom and baby first meet each other (at least it wasn't for me). In addition, to all the exciting challenges a new baby can bring, unfortunately, some breastfeeding mom's can end up with a painful infection of the breast, called mastitis. When my son Kanyon was first born, I had a couple of instances where mastitis had threatened to rear its ugly head. Despite surviving natural childbirth, it was painful enough for me to say "no thanks!", and I swung back with a few natural remedies. I'm happy to say I managed to escape the full blown experience.

If you are a mom unfamiliar with mastitis, consider yourself lucky. Mastitis is an inflammation or infection of the breast usually found in nursing mothers. It is most common in the first weeks after birth, however may occur at any stage of lactation.

### **Signs and Symptoms**

Mastitis is usually associated with painful, swollen and engorged breasts. Breasts may feel warm and tender to the touch; and some discharge from the nipple may be seen. You may find it extremely painful to nurse or pump breast milk, but decreased nursing may increase the risk for complications (including abscesses or systemic infection). Mastitis typically affects only one breast, and can appear quickly and without warning.

### **Causes**

Like many other breastfeeding moms, the first weeks of breastfeeding may have been accompanied by sore, cracked or bleeding nipples. Mastitis is more prevalent in the first weeks because bacteria can enter your breast

through these cracks in the skin or through the opening to the milk ducts. The bacteria can cause an infection that leads to pain and swelling of the breast.

## Prevention

Practicing a few simple tips may prevent the occurrence or reoccurrence of mastitis.

- Avoid tight-fitting bras, or wire bras that may restrict milk flow.
- Change breast feeding positions to ensure proper drainage of your breasts.
- Allow your baby to completely empty one breast before switching to the other breast during feeding.
- Alternate which breast you use first each time you breast feed.
- Make sure you have a proper latch for EVERY feeding. If the latch doesn't feel comfortable, break the latch by inserting your baby finger and start over. Never allow an improper latch even if it's for a short feed.
- Keep nipple area clean and dry.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Consult a lactation consultant. Even if you think you have the hang of breastfeeding, a lactation consultant can be a wonderful resource to a first time mom.

## Home Treatment

If you find yourself with a bout of mastitis, using these few simple home treatments as soon as the first signs appear may help to resolve the infection quickly.

- Before nursing or pumping use heat and gentle, but firm massage. Apply warm compresses or a heat pack, or take a warm shower before breastfeeding or pumping. Massage from the affected area toward the nipple.
- Continue breastfeeding. Your baby will not become ill. This is one of the best choices you can make to treat your mastitis. Aim to breastfeed at least every 2 hours, even if you do not think you are producing much milk. If you are unable to breastfeed that frequently, pump or hand express milk. Keeping the milk flowing helps rid the breast of the infection.

## Conventional Treatment

The standard treatment for mastitis is a 10-14 day course of antibiotics, and ibuprofen or a similar anti-inflammatory for the pain and swelling. However, antibiotics may increase your risk for a secondary yeast infection, called thrush, of the nipple or infant's mouth.

## Homeopathic Medicines

Homeopathy is a very gentle, safe, yet effective natural method of healing. It is based on the principle of *like cures like*. When the correct homeopathic medicine is given it can cause a quick healing response.

Below are some homeopathic medicines that may be indicated in certain cases of mastitis.

***Belladonna*** is useful when breasts are *red, hot* and swollen. The pain is *throbbing* and comes on *very suddenly*. Pain may be accompanied by a high fever and red streaks that radiate from the nipple. Often, the smallest jarring or touch causes pain in the breast. May be accompanied by lack of

thirst.

**Bryonia** is indicated when breasts are hot, painful and *hard*. Symptoms are much worse from warmth and the smallest motion. May be accompanied by irritability. *Thirst* for large drinks.

**Castor equi** is a great medicine when nipples are *cracked* and sore. Swollen breasts are very tender to the touch, especially from clothing and feel worse from descending stairs. The breasts may be violently *itchy* and red.

**Hepar sulphuris** is an effective medicine in instances when sore, cracked nipples are accompanied by *pus* or abscesses. Mothers may notice a discharge with a *foul or cheesy odor*. Pains may be *splinter-like*. May also be chilly and irritable.

**Phytolacca** is indicated when swollen breasts are *lumpy*. Breast has a *purplish hue*. Nipples may be cracked and excoriated, and the mother will often experience *intense pain that radiates* throughout her body when the baby latches to the breast.

**Silica** may be used when breasts are painful, especially near the nipple. Nipples *easily ulcerate*. Mothers may not be able to sleep because of the constant *burning and darting* pain in the breast, especially if the left breast is affected. Pain is relieved with warmth. May be indicated for women with recurring mastitis.

**Sulphur** is useful when nipples are *cracked and burn* as soon as the baby lets go. The breasts are red, hot, hard and red rays extend from the nipples.

**Dosage.** Homeopathic medicines come in different potencies. The most readily available in the health food stores are 30C and 6C. Dissolve three pellets of 30C under the tongue every 4 hours until you notice improvement. If 30C is not available take 6C by the same method every 2 hours. Once you notice improvement stop taking the medicine. If symptoms return, take another dose. If no improvement is seen in 12 hours, try another homeopathic medicine. If the correct homeopathic medicine is taken, mastitis should significantly improve in 24-48 hours. Certain cases of mastitis may require professional homeopathic care.

### **When to seek medical advice**

Treating yourself at home and avoiding a visit to the doctor can be very satisfying. However, if problems persist or you experience flu-like symptoms (fever and chills), see your healthcare practitioner.

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***A friendly note to my fellow mothers of the Next Generation Baby community.*** It is important to remember that monthly breast self-examination should still be a regular part of caring for yourself. It is still possible to develop breast cancer if you are a nursing mother. In some cases, mastitis may be confused with a rare form of breast cancer called inflammatory breast cancer. This is why it is always important to do monthly breast self-exams and to see your doctor for a yearly well woman check-up.

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