

## The Painful Side of Breast Feeding!

Did you know that Women's Health Physiotherapist's treat mastitis and that antibiotics are not your only option? Furthermore, that you may not require antibiotics at all for mastitis! What, why, how I hear you ask? Mastitis is inflammation of the breast with or without infection, what you see and feel is the inflammation. Diagnosis of an accompanying infection requires pathology to analyse a sample of your breast milk. As Physiotherapists, we are trained to treat inflammation which would make us the perfect people to treat mastitis!

You are certainly not alone in suffering, it is estimated that up to 33% of breastfeeding women will suffer an episode of mastitis. The highest incidence occurs in the first 2-3week post-partum and is the number 1 reason women prematurely stop breast feeding. Luckily though, of this group less than 3% will develop an abscess (requiring further medical intervention).

### Signs and symptoms to look for:

- Redness
- Pain and heat
- Engorged / blocked / firm / lumps felt in the breast
- Temperature
- Flu like symptoms

### What **NOT** to do:

Apply pressure and or massage your breast! Imagine your inflamed breast as a sprained ankle, would you massage that inflammation? Certainly not, so why would you massage your breast? If you do use this technique you can damage the vascular (your blood vessels) in the breast and damage the ducts causing further blockages. This can also lead to the development of an abscess which may need to be drained via needle aspiration. So ladies, prevention is the best medicine for an abscess so always be nice and gentle with your breasts!



To the left is a picture highlighting milk ducts within the breast. Recent studies have shown that there are 8-12 ducts per breast.

Previously the idea behind massaging the breast to clear blockages is that these ducts looked as they do when they reach the nipple, nice uniform lines. However, as you can see they are far from the nice uniform lines they become in the nipple, rather they are a complex web spread throughout the breast. As you can see from the picture they run between and underneath each other, looking at this makes it is easy to understand how massaging a blockage towards your breast can cause more harm than good.

### What **YOU** can do:

- Get lots of rest (don't be scared to ask for help)
- Immune health (good nutrition, lower stress levels and lots of sleep and REST!)
- Do not miss/skip or have erratic feeding patterns (even when in pain try to feed as normal)
- If it is too painful to feed try expressing, pumping or a nipple shield until you can resume normal feeding patterns with the affected breast
- Avoid compressive forces particularly wire bras, fingers or sleeping on your tummy
- Be very gentle and kind to your breasts

### What **WE** can do:

- Give you all the right advice and great tips and tricks on feeding, rest, supplements and exercises
- Help you prevent reoccurrence
- Treat your breast! In our Clinic we use therapeutic ultrasound, this is a time for you to sit back and relax. The treatment is pain free, allowing you some time to catch up on that much needed rest for your recovery
- We can also supply you with other treatment techniques if we feel necessary such as taping and support garments

**So if you or someone you know is suffering from mastitis, pass on our contact details and encourage them to book an appointment! The sooner we get onto it the better!**