

Sore & cracked nipples

Kōmata mamae, tāngohengohe me pakoki

Nipple pain is one of the most common reasons for giving up breastfeeding/chestfeeding.

Nipple tenderness is normal in the first days after you start breastfeeding/chestfeeding. Your nipples may feel tender for up to 30 seconds at the beginning of each feed if your pēpi (baby) is latched well. But this tenderness should ease as they suckle.

You will often feel the peak of the pain or tenderness between 3 to 6 days after giving birth.



Causes of ongoing nipple pain

Nipple pain can be caused by problems with your baby's position and if they are not latching at your breast effectively. Latching can be difficult, especially if your breasts are engorged (too full). Infections, or a problem with your baby's tongue (tongue tie) can also cause nipple pain.

Important

If you have nipple pain or tenderness for longer than 30 seconds into each feed, see your midwife, general practice team, lactation consultant or support person as soon as possible. Also seek help if you continue to have sore or damaged nipples or breast pain after 5 to 6 days.

Treating ongoing nipple pain

The first thing your midwife or lactation consultant will do is check your baby's position and latch at your breast. They will correct any latching difficulties.

Your pain will usually go away in a few days once your pēpi is feeding effectively.

Other treatment will depend on what is causing the pain and may include pain relief or a course of antibiotics if you have an infection.

You and your pēpi may need antifungal treatment if you have thrush of the nipple.

Getting help with nipple pain

If you are worried about your breasts or breastfeeding/chestfeeding or if you need any help, contact your midwife, general practice team or support service. You could also seek help from a lactation consultant, breastfeeding peer counsellor or support group. See *Getting help with breastfeeding/chestfeeding* (go to www.healthinfo.org.nz and search for "breastfeeding help").

Written by HealthInfo clinical advisers. Last reviewed October 2024.