

Breastfeeding and your baby



Nipple pain (vasospasm)

Vasospasm is a sudden constriction (cramping) of blood vessels in the nipple. It can be very painful and may feel like a burning, shooting or throbbing pain. Your nipple may change colour - turning white, blue, and red before returning to its usual colour. You may feel pain before, during and /or after feeding your baby. This pain may last for a few seconds, minutes or longer.

You are more likely to suffer nipple vasospasm if you:

- Have a family history of Raynaud's phenomenon – a condition that can decrease blood flow to extremities, ears, nose, and nipples causing pain.
- Tend to have 'poor circulation' (i.e. cold hands or feet).
- Have a low body mass index (i.e. are thin)

Possible causes of vasospasm are:

- Nipple pain reacting to cold air
- Poor attachment of the baby to the breast
- Cracked nipple, nipple thrush, dermatitis or infection
- Incorrect use of breast pumps and nipple shields
- Some medications and chemicals that constrict blood vessels may worsen the pain, (i.e. beta blockers, chemotherapy agents and smoking)
- Caffeinated drinks such as coffee, tea and cola

How can I manage vasospasm?

- Ensuring correct attachment of your baby to the breast (see Positioning and Attachment fact sheet)
- Avoiding caffeine and nicotine
- Keeping nipples warm (i.e. a heat pack, warmed soft cloth or Breast warmers are available to buy from local pharmacies)
- Wearing an extra layer of clothing
- Trying nipple massage with warm olive oil-soaked gauze/cotton ball (see Cracked and sore nipples fact sheet)



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If pain continues:

- Seek professional advice from a Maternal and Child Health Nurse or Lactation consultant. This may involve the health professional observing a breastfeed, or referral to your GP or health professional for prescription medication
- Over the counter pain relief medicine such as Ibuprofen and Paracetamol as per instructions on the packaging
- Fish oil, evening primrose oil or magnesium supplements may improve blood vessel relaxation and reduce spasm

How can I find more information?

Phone	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maternal and Child Health - Early Pregnancy and Parenting support line (02) 5124 1775, or• Central Health Intake (CHI) on (02) 5124 9977
Websites	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Australian Breastfeeding Association - 1800 686 268 www.breastfeeding.asn.au• Pregnancy Birth and Baby - 1800 882 436 www.pregnancybirthbaby.org.au• www.health.act.gov.au/breastfeeding
Visit	Your GP or walk in Centre



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Acknowledgement of Country



Canberra Health Services acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land, the Ngunnawal people. Canberra Health Services respects their continuing culture and connections to the land and the unique contributions they make to the life of this area. Canberra Health Services also acknowledges and welcomes Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples who are part of the community we serve.



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