

How to “Dry Up” a Milk Supply

There are many reasons why a mother may not breastfeed, including choice, health concerns, or infant loss. Regardless, a woman’s body will begin to produce more milk approximately 48-72 hours after birth. There are several ways to reduce the discomfort of engorgement and assist with reduction or “drying up” the milk supply.

Many of our grandmothers were told to buy an elastic bandage and simply “bind the breasts”, deal with the pain and in a few days, it would be gone. Some of these women were also given the “dry up shot”. We now know that binding of the breasts can lead to a breast infection (mastitis) and the injection of bromocriptine can cause other serious health problems.

The current recommendations include:

- **Avoid** nipple stimulation
- **Wear** a comfortable (but not tight) bra
- **Apply ice** to breasts. A bag of frozen vegetables (peas or lima beans) will mold well to the breasts and ease discomfort.
- **Apply raw cabbage leaves** to breasts. Take a few leaves from the head of cabbage, squeeze slightly in hand to “get the juices flowing” and apply directly to breast. After 45 minutes or when the leaves wilt, apply fresh leaves.
- **Use ibuprofen** for pain as recommended by your health care provider.
- **Discuss with your health care provider** the use of antihistamines or decongestant. For example, 60-120mg of pseudoephedrine every 4-6 hours as needed may help reduce milk supply.
- **Consider drinking** 1-4 cups of sage tea per day.
- **Peppermint oil** has been anecdotally (word of mouth) shown to reduce milk production. Specifically, peppermint Altoids. Either suck or swallow them.
- **If breasts** are severely engorged and the above techniques are not helpful, consider hand expressing a few drops to relieve the pressure in the breast. The milk can be given to the baby.
- **If abrupt weaning** is a medical necessity for the health and safety of the mother, discuss with your doctor the possibility of taking cabergoline.



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If you have a fever over 101°F (38.3°C), pain and/or redness in a specific area of the breast, feel like you are coming down with the flu, it could be a sign of breast or other infection. It may be temporarily necessary to remove a majority of the milk from the breasts by hand expression or pumping to help the infection clear, along with the use of antibiotics. Contact your primary care provider.

The information provided is intended solely for general educational and informational purposes only. It is neither intended nor implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice. Always seek the advice of your healthcare provider for any questions you may have regarding your or your infant's medical condition. Never disregard professional medical advice or delay in seeking it because of something you have received in this information.

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