

FACTSHEET



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Breast care for breastfeeding mothers after the death of a child

Time after the death of your infant can be physically and emotionally exhausting. Accept any support offered to you at this time.

If you had been breastfeeding your infant before their death, it is important that you look after your breasts. When milk is not regularly removed from the breast, milk production slowly stops of its own accord. You may, however, experience breast engorgement, leakage of milk, discomfort and some pain during this time.

Often the only treatment needed to stop making milk, is to limit the amount of milk removed from your breasts. To give your body the message to stop making milk, express only enough to keep your breasts comfortable, unless you need to clear a blockage to prevent mastitis. Caring for your breasts at this difficult time is important, as it will help make them more comfortable and reduce the risk of a blocked duct or mastitis. The following suggestions may give you some relief during this time.

Suggestions as breasts become uncomfortable:

- Wear a well-fitting bra to give firm breast support, rather than a tight breast binder.
- Breast pads will help absorb leaking milk. These can be the disposable or the reusable type. Change them when they become wet.
- Avoid excessive stimulation of the breast.
- For pain relief, apply cold compresses, e.g. chilled washers, cool gel packs or washed cabbage leaves.
- Avoid excessive heat on your breasts.

- Take analgesia if you need to relieve pain and discomfort (e.g. paracetamol).
- Handle breasts gently during this time as they can bruise easily when engorged.
- Express a little milk to relieve fullness and make the breasts more comfortable. This won't interfere with the progress of suppression, as you are not emptying the breast. Hand expressing in a warm shower or bath can be effective as warmth and relaxation will encourage milk ejection without added nipple and breast stimulation.
- Maintain a normal fluid intake.

Things to watch out for:

- Engorgement- breasts become swollen, hard and painful. If this happens it is recommended that you express your breasts completely once to relieve the pain. Then over the next few days express enough milk to keep your breasts comfortable. Applying cool packs, avoiding excessive heat and taking analgesia, as needed, to increase comfort may also help.
- Mastitis –lumps, red areas on the breast. Temperatures or flu like symptoms may indicate you have mastitis and medical assessment should be sought promptly.

How long will I have milk for?

It may take weeks or months for your milk to disappear completely. Leakage may occur for some time after discomfort has settled. It may be worth talking to your

GP about potential medications to stop/reduce your breast milk.

The day of the funeral:

This will be a difficult and emotional day. The following hints may be helpful to consider:

- Express milk for comfort before the funeral and during the day as needed.
- Wear a bra which is comfortable and well supported. Your bra should not be too tight.
- There may be some leakage of milk, so be prepared with some extra breast pads.
- Patterned and dark coloured tops are less likely to show wet patches.
- Jackets or cardigans can help cover up wet spots.
- Use analgesia if needed, to help relieve breast pain.

It is important that you are well supported during this difficult time.

Helpful organisations to contact for support include:

- Grief and loss support line– phone 1300308307 (24 hour bereavement support)
<https://rednosegriefandloss.org.au>
- Your local General Practitioner
- SANDS - phone 1300 0 sands (1300 072 637) (Still born and Neonatal Death support
24/7 volunteer supporters are on call)
www.sands.org.au
- Australian breastfeeding Association helpline - phone 18006862686
www.breastfeeding.asn.au
- Grief line – phone 1300 845 745 (Confidential and anonymous telephone support, including counselling in diverse languages)