



How to Deal With Blocked Nipple Pores

Donna Murray, RN, BSN

A nipple bleb or milk bleb is a tiny white or yellow spot that forms on the nipple at the end of a milk duct or nipple pore. These small, milk-filled cysts or blockages are thought to be created by breast milk that has become thick and hard.

If you have a milk bleb, it might look like a smooth, shiny, singular white dot (similar to a whitehead pimple). Milk blisters are often associated with a plugged milk duct, but they can

2
A nipple bleb can cause extreme pain during breastfeeding, or it might not bother you at all. If it isn't painful, leave the blister alone and breastfeed as you normally would.

If a milk bleb is painful, you might not want to breastfeed. However, frequent breastfeeding is necessary to maintain your breast milk supply and can help dislodge the bleb, as well as prevent clogged ducts, breast engorgement, and mastitis.

If the pain is bearable, continue to breastfeed as often as you can. If it's too painful, pump your breast milk. A quality breast pump may help remove the bleb.

If you get a nipple bleb, you'll want to minimize the discomfort while you wait for it to get better. There are a few things you can do to relieve any pain you might have and help the bleb heal.

- **Breastfeed often and with proper technique.** You can help prevent milk ducts from clogging by using proper breastfeeding techniques, nursing often, alternating breastfeeding positions, and avoiding tight tops and underwire bras. Also, make sure that your baby is latching on correctly.
- **Keep it clean.** With clean hands and a clean washcloth, cleanse the area around the bleb. If the plug is protruding from the bleb, you might be able to use your finger to loosen it or gently pull it out.
- **Press gently.** If you can tolerate it, you can try to apply gentle, slow, pressure from behind the bleb to loosen or release the plug.
- **Soak, massage, and apply heat.** Moist heat can help loosen a blocked duct and release the plug.
- **Try lecithin.** Talk to your healthcare provider or a lactation consultant about a lecithin supplement. Lecithin is thought to help heal and prevent plugged milk ducts. You might

also try liquid lecithin or Dr. Jack Newman's All-Purpose Nipple Ointment (an antibiotic and anti-inflammatory ointment).

- **Use ice packs or cold cabbage leaves.** A cool compress can sometimes help relieve pain in your breasts. You can also ask your provider if it is OK for you to take an over-the-counter (OTC) pain reliever such as Tylenol (acetaminophen) or Motrin (ibuprofen).

When the pore is open, the term bleb is used. When the pore is closed, the term blister is used.

- **Wear breast shells.** These products can protect your breasts from the fabric of your bra or clothing if it rubs against the bleb and causes discomfort.

Breast Conditions Mistaken for Blebs

Nipple blebs can be mistaken for other common breast problems. For example, nipple blisters or thrush can look similar to a milk blister.

Friction Blisters

A friction blister is larger than a nipple bleb and does not usually cause severe pain. This type of blister is usually caused by a poor latch or friction from a powerful suck. If you use a breast pump, a flange that does not fit properly can also cause friction blisters.

Once the breastfeeding or pumping technique is corrected, friction nipple blisters will usually heal on their own within a few days.

Thrush

Thrush is a fungal (yeast) infection caused by *Candida albicans*. The infection is common in the mouth and vagina, but you can also get it on your nipples. It can cause severe itching, burning, and pain in your breast, especially while you are breastfeeding.

Thrush usually makes the nipples look shiny and red, but it can also appear as small white patches on the skin.

A few milk blebs on the nipple could resemble thrush.

Your baby's mouth can also become infected with thrush, which can make it painful for them to feed. Thrush and nipple blebs require different treatments. Thrush can spread quickly and cause a painful breast infection called mastitis. If you are worried you might have thrush, be sure to call your provider.

When to See Your Provider

If a nipple bleb or blister becomes too painful and does not go away on its own in a few weeks (even with a good latch and frequent breastfeeding) then it's time to meet with your provider. Sometimes, a thin layer of skin forms and covers the milk bleb, which prevents it from healing properly. Your provider can use a sterile needle to break open the skin and remove the bleb.

They might also instruct you on how to safely open the blister yourself at home.

You should immediately call your provider if you have signs of an infection, such as a fever, redness, swelling, or drainage from the nipple (that isn't breast milk).

Nipple blebs are not usually serious, but they can be painful. Breast and nipple pain might become intense enough that it makes you want to stop breastfeeding. In fact, pain is a common cause of early weaning.

If you want to prevent nipple blebs or heal the ones you have, breastfeeding often and with proper technique can help.

If you do get a milk bleb, try to breastfeed through it. The bleb should go away on its own

within a few weeks. However, if breastfeeding is too painful or a bleb does not get better, call your provider. They can help you get the appropriate treatment