Breastfeeding – Use of nipple shields

A nipple shield may have been suggested to you if you have been experiencing certain types of breastfeeding difficulties and other options have not solved the problem. It is advisable to access breastfeeding support whilst using the shield.

It is not recommended to use a nipple shield before your milk is flowing freely. Colostrum or the first milk, rich in antibodies, is often produced in small amounts and is thick and sticky; therefore it is harder for your baby to feed from the breast with a shield in place.

Breast drainage can be a problem when using a nipple shield, which may result in under-supply or inadequate drainage of your breasts - leading to blocked ducts and sometimes mastitis. You may need to gently massage/compress your breast when your baby is feeding or express following the feed to ensure breast drainage.

There are three different sizes of shields so be careful in choosing the correct size as an ill-fitting shield will cause problems. Choose a nipple shield you think would fit your nipple size.

How to attach your baby to the breast when using a shield

To draw the nipple into the shield first:
- Turn the shield almost inside out.
- Place the centre of the shield over the nipple and hold the shield with fingers at the outer edge.
- Touch your baby’s lips with the shield and wait for a wide mouth then bring baby to the shield, ensuring a deep latch.
- Keep baby close to your breast. Feed duration may be longer with a shield.

Monitor your baby’s weight progress when using a nipple shield.

It is important to clean the shield following the feed with a cold water rinse, hot soapy wash then rinse well and allow to air dry. Store in a dry container.
How to attach your baby to the breast without using a shield

Once you are home from hospital allow time for your breasts to settle and become manageable, or your baby is more alert, before trying without the shield. It is recommended to try feeding without the shield when your baby is around seven days to three weeks old as it becomes harder to feed without a shield the longer it is used.

If your baby fusses or pulls off the breast and becomes distressed when attempting without the shield, begin feeding with the shield in place and try again without it towards the end of the feed. Try different positions such as football hold or standing up or rocking to attach. Try shaping the breast more when attaching with your hand underneath the breast making a ‘U’ shape. Keep your fingers well away from the nipple.

Offering lots of skin to skin contact can entice your baby back to the breast and adjust the hormones that increase milk supply. This may be cuddling after a feed, lying together bare to the waist or having a bath together. Get your partner to pass your baby to you whilst in the bath. Let your baby lie relaxed near your breast and see if they become interested in feeding.

Remember to try without the shield when you are feeling relaxed with your baby. You may take a few steps forward and one step back. Sometimes it takes weeks to fully withdraw from the shield.

Feel assured that despite using the shield that you are doing the best you can for your baby. You are providing your own unique milk specifically designed for your baby and with patience your baby will accept the breast without the shield.

Please feel free to call the Extended Lactation Care Service through Baxter Maternity Services Reception on 4215 2060 if you experience any difficulties or have any questions.

Reference