



ILCA's *Inside Track* for breastfeeding mothers

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Breastfeeding Was Going Well and Now My Nipples Hurt: Could My Baby or I Have a Yeast Infection?

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Sometimes, days, weeks, or months after breastfeeding has been going well, a woman's nipples may begin to hurt. The skin on the nipple and areola (the darker skin around the nipple) can become discolored. It may turn bright pink or, in darker skinned women, become darker. The skin may appear shiny, and within a few days, skin may begin to flake. The baby may have white patches on the tongue, the inside of the cheeks, and the roof of the mouth. The patches cannot be wiped off. Such an infection is called thrush in the infant, and the mother may have a yeast or thrush infection of the nipple.

How Do You Get a Yeast or Thrush Infection?

Yeast grows best in warm, dark, wet places. Everyone has yeast living on their skin and mouth. Sometimes it gets out of balance and grows quickly, causing pain or itching. Common reasons that mothers develop thrush infections are:

- Taking antibiotics, steroids, or birth control pills
- Not changing soaked breast pads often
- The infant gets thrush and passes it to the mother through cracked skin
- Being diabetic or having poorly controlled diabetes

Nipple pain or itching can happen for other reasons, not only yeast.

The photos help show what a yeast infection of the nipple or thrush in the infant's mouth can look like. The baby may also have a yeast diaper rash that looks like spreading red spots.



Yeast on Nipple Appearing Bright Pink. Photo courtesy of Kay Hoover, MEd, IBCLC, RLC.

How Is a Yeast or Thrush Infection Treated?

A health care provider can help determine if mother or baby has a thrush infection. There are several ways to treat this problem. Many times with a yeast infection between a nursing mother and baby, 1 person will have signs and the other will not. BOTH MOTHER AND BABY ARE TREATED at the same time. There are several common medicines used to treat thrush infections in the mouth and on the nipple:

Nystatin is an ointment or cream medicine, prescribed by your doctor or midwife. It is applied on the nipples 3 to 4 times a day for 7 to 14 days. The baby is treated with a liquid



medicine that is applied to the inside of the baby's mouth 3 to 4 times a day.

Miconazole is an oral gel for baby and a cream for mom, which can be bought over the counter. The oral gel for baby can be found in many countries outside of the United States. Apply after feedings 3 to 4 times a day for 7 days.



Thrush in Mouth. Photo courtesy of Ingrid Dixon, RN, BSN, IBCLC.

Gentian Violet, 1% solution is an over-the-counter liquid medicine in the United States. Use a cotton swab to paint the inside of the baby's mouth and mother's nipples once a day for 3 days. Overuse can burn baby's mouth. This medicine is a purple dye and it will stain anything it touches. Baby's face can be protected from staining by putting a layer of purified lanolin on it before using the Gentian Violet. NOTE: If a drug store will make it, use a 0.5% alcohol-free solution and apply 2 times a day for 3 days.

Find Help Fast

An IBCLC[®] is an "International Board Certified Lactation Consultant[®]": someone with special training to help breastfeeding families. Go to "Find a Lactation Consultant" at www.ilca.org to locate a lactation consultant in your area. You can also ask your doctor or a nurse at your hospital.

Fluconazole (Diflucan) is a liquid medicine for baby and a tablet for mom prescribed by your doctor or midwife. It is often given once a day for 7 to 21 days.

What Else Can Be Done to Get Rid of a Thrush Infection?

In addition to medicine, hand washing is very important. Change breast pads often, and clean things that come in contact with mom's breasts or baby's mouth such as toys, pacifiers, pump parts, bottles, and nipples. Wash soft toys and bras in hot water. Hot soapy water and white vinegar also help to kill yeast.

When to Call for Help

An International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) can help you if:

- You have nipple pain and are not sure what is causing it.
- You have other concerns about breastfeeding.

Call an IBCLC or other health care provider if:

- You are using medicine and you and baby do not feel better after 2 to 3 days.
- You have any other signs of illness that start, such as fever, chills, body ache.

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