



Management of Nipple Pain & Trauma

Evidence Based Information Sheets for Consumers

What is evidence based health information?

Just as a detective searches for evidence to solve a crime, so too do health professionals look for evidence to guide their practice. The detective must have evidence to support their case. In a similar fashion, the health care professional must have evidence to support their proposed course of treatment. They search for information that will help them to provide the most effective or beneficial form of care to their patients. Due to the wealth of information available to them, the process of discovering which information is the best can be difficult and time consuming. It would take an enormous amount of time for your doctor to sift through the large amounts of research and information available to them on a particular topic. This is where the Joanna Briggs Institute comes into play. We conduct the 'detective' work, providing them (and you) with the best available evidence.

Evidence Reliability

The evidence related to the topic of each consumer publication produced by the Joanna Briggs Institute is assessed for reliability and quality. We do not rate a procedure or treatment, but the evidence (or research) that is available to support it.

Evidence can play a critical role in any investigation and it is important for detectives to recognise evidence that will provide 'reliable' information to aid in the investigation. This is also the case when assessing health information, as some types of evidence are more reliable than others.

For Joanna Briggs Institute evidence based information for consumers, you can be assured that the best available evidence is utilised. If you would like more information about research and levels of evidence, please contact the Joanna Briggs Institute or visit the research page of our consumer web site.

"The procedures described in this pamphlet must only be used by people who have appropriate expertise in the field to which the procedure relates. The applicability of any information must be established before relying on it. While care has been taken to ensure that this pamphlet summarises available research and expert consensus, any loss, damage, cost, expense or liability suffered or incurred as a result of reliance on these procedures (whether arising in contract, negligence or otherwise) is, to the extent permitted by law, excluded".

What does this mean for consumers?

As consumers of health care it is important to know that your treatment is being based on the best available evidence. It is also important that you are provided with all of the information in order to have greater independence in relation to your own health care decisions and to be involved in the decision making process.

Further information

The Joanna Briggs Institute Consumer Information Program provides up to date literature reviews to ensure your information is based on the best available evidence. The Institute also produces systematic reviews and Best Practice Information sheets aimed at clinicians and health professionals. This means you are provided with the same high standard of publications based on the same information as those working directly in the field.

Contact details

The Joanna Briggs Institute has collaborating centres throughout Australia and overseas. If you would like more information on the Institute, its publications or wish to contact a Joanna Briggs Institute collaborating centre near you, please visit our web site:

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The best available
evidence...

for new mums



About Nipple Pain & Trauma

Breastfeeding is important for the health and development of both you and your child and also provides the best nutrition for your child. The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends exclusive breastfeeding for six months followed by the introduction of solids with continued breastfeeding until two years of age.

Symptoms

Unfortunately, many women experience nipple pain and trauma when breastfeeding. Symptoms of nipple pain and trauma may include pain, redness, cracking, swelling, peeling, bleeding, blisters, bruising, scabbing or discharge. These complications are considered to be amongst the most significant factors that prevent new mothers from breastfeeding in the first weeks of motherhood. Up to one third of mothers who experience these symptoms may change to alternate methods of feeding their babies within the first six weeks after giving birth.

Causes

There are several different positions you may use when feeding your baby. A good feeding position by you and your baby, and correct attachment of your baby, are important factors in successful breastfeeding. Poor positioning and incorrect attachment have been identified as causes of nipple pain and trauma. Antenatal and postnatal education may help with positioning and correct attachment of your baby to prevent nipple pain and trauma.

References

This Consumer Information Sheet has been based on a systematic review and Best Practice Information Sheet undertaken by the Joanna Briggs Institute under the guidance of a review panel of clinical experts.

Page, T., Lockwood, C., Guest, K. The management of nipple pain and/or trauma associated with breastfeeding: a systematic review. JBI Reports 1(4), Blackwell Publishing Asia.

Treatment Options

There are several treatment options available to prevent and treat nipple pain and trauma associated with breastfeeding.

Compress

A compress is when a breast pad or teabag is placed in warm water, then the excess fluid squeezed out and the pad or teabag placed over the nipple. Both have demonstrated effectiveness in the treatment and prevention of nipple pain and trauma. However, a breast pad is preferable due to teabags leaving a tannin smell and taste on the nipple.

Breast milk massage

Expressed breast milk is massaged into the nipple and allowed to air-dry after feeding. This simple practice has been demonstrated to reduce the length of time cracks take to heal.

The following treatments did not have enough evidence or there was limited published research to make any recommendation about their use:

Education

Postnatal education is vital for new mothers and can include visual, written and verbal information covering simple breast anatomy, breastfeeding technique, various positions and attachment of your baby and the stages of suckling. The impact of postnatal education on nipple pain and trauma could not be identified.

Dressings

Film dressings showed improved healing in nipples but caused pain on removal. Hydrogel wound dressings are non-adherent, easily and painlessly removed and were thought to be ideal for breast feeding mothers, but caused a high infection rate.

Sprays and ointments

There is a lot of literature on different aerosol sprays, lanolin and other ointments that have been used to treat/prevent nipple pain and trauma. None of them demonstrated significant results in the published research.

Breast shells

Breast shells, or shields, are hard, plastic devices that provide an air barrier to protect the skin from friction and/or pressure from clothing and other contact between breast feeding episodes.

The evidence suggests...

No single treatment was identified that offers a dramatic effect in terms of preventing or treating pain and/or trauma in breastfeeding women. However, there is potential for some benefits for reducing pain and increasing comfort, which may increase breastfeeding duration.

Preventing nipple pain/trauma

- Warm water compresses are recommended for the prevention of nipple pain
- Keeping nipples clean and dry is recommended for the prevention of cracked nipples

Treating nipple pain/trauma

- Warm water or teabag compresses are recommended for the reduction of nipple pain
- Application of hydrogel dressings is **not** recommended due to the increased likelihood of infection
- Breastmilk massaged onto the nipple after feeding reduces the duration of cracked nipples