



TEN STEP TUESDAY

All About Nipple Shields

Breasts and nipples come in all shapes and sizes. While breast size and shape seldom affect a mother's ability to produce milk, nipple size and shape can make breastfeeding easier or harder for some babies. In some situations, a nipple shield may assist the infant in achieving areolar grasp latch and effectively transferring milk. However, when mismanaged, nipple shields can reduce milk transfer at the breast which may impact a mother's milk supply. For this reason, nipple shields should not be routinely used to treat latch-on problems, or to prevent or manage sore or cracked nipples. Nipple shields should be used only in conjunction with a lactation consultant's assessment and after other attempts to correct the difficulty have failed.



good latch



poor latch

When might we consider using a nipple shield?

- Difficulty achieving or maintaining an effective latch, after 24 hours
- To compensate for a weak or disorganized infant suck (i.e.: late preterm/preterm baby)
- In cases of breast refusal, bottle nipple preference or when the mother is at risk for early termination of breastfeeding due to breastfeeding challenges

How to size

Using the correct size shield is important. The base diameter should fit the base of mom's nipple. The teat should be the shortest height necessary for fit. Smaller sizes are generally more appropriate for preterm infants, while larger sizes may be more appropriate for term infants or older babies. Compromise to find the best fit for the dyad.

How to apply

Properly placing the nipple shield helps will improve milk transfer with the shield. Moisten shield with warm tap water to make it more pliable and to help it adhere to the breast. Center the tip of the shield over the maternal nipple, and turn it slightly inside out. Apply shield by slightly inverting, placed over nipple, pull edges outward. See the video: <https://youtu.be/f1dl6-ZELHY>

Cleaning the shield

It is important to keep the nipple shield clean. Wash in hot soapy water and rinse well after each use.

Protecting mom's milk supply

Milk supply is controlled by how much milk a baby takes. A small, weak or poorly suckling baby may under-stimulate the milk supply. When using a nipple shield, it is important to hand express or pump after nursing to make sure the breasts are adequately stimulated. Expressed milk can be used to supplement the baby. Expressing milk after feedings may be necessary until it is clear that the milk supply is stable and the baby is growing well.

Weaning off the nipple shield

The goal is to return to full breastfeeding with no need for special equipment. As breastfeeding improves, mom can try removing the shield at various times during each feeding. If the baby seems unable to nurse without the shield, this means the problem is not yet resolved. Mom can just keep practicing and keeping breastfeeding attempts without a shield LOW STRESS. So long as the baby is growing well, the continued use of the shield is not a major problem. If it appears that the baby could manage without the shield, some mothers try spending a day doing lots of skin to skin time around the house. Quiet time with increased skin-to-skin contact and frequent practicing will reassure the baby that he or she doesn't really need the shield any more.

Talk to any one of the LCs on the unit if you have questions or have a couplet who you feel would benefit from a nipple shield. Or if you decide to use one when the LCs are not available, please remember to document use of a nipple shield and education provided so we can follow the mom closely and support her breastfeeding goals.

For more information contact

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