Painful nipples associated with vasospasm is due to a sudden constriction (tightening) of blood vessels in the nipple. The pain may be felt before, during and after a feed and may feel like a burning, shooting or throbbing pain. The nipple may change colour and go white, blue and red before returning to its normal colour. Symptoms may last for a few seconds, minutes or longer.

You are more likely to suffer from vasospasm if you:

- Have a family history of Raynaud’s phenomenon.
- Tend to have cold fingers or feet or have ‘poor circulation’.
- Have a low body mass index (i.e. are thin).

Some possible triggers of vasospasm include:

- Nipples reaction to cold air.
- Poor attachment of the baby to the breast.
- Nipple damage, nipple thrush or infection.
- Some medications and chemicals may worsen vasospasm, for example smoking.

How can I manage vasospasm?

Although there is not a specific cause of vasospasm, avoiding the triggers will help.

- Ensure correct attachment of the baby to the breast.
- Avoid caffeine and nicotine.
- Keep nipples warm, e.g. a heat pack or warmed soft cloth.
- Wear an extra layer of clothing.
- Invest in ‘breast warmers’ (available from Australian Breastfeeding Association).
- If pain continues you may consider medications or supplements. These include:
  - Ibuprofen
  - Fish oil capsules (containing essential fatty acids)
  - Evening primrose oil
  - Magnesium tablets
  - Vitamin B6
  - Prescription medication.

How should I attach my baby to my breast?

**STEP 1**

Hold your baby close to you with their nose level with your nipple.

**STEP 2**

Wait until your baby opens their mouth really wide with the tongue down. You can encourage them to do this by gently stroking their top lip.

**STEP 3**

Bring your baby on to your breast.

**STEP 4**

Your baby will tilt their head back and come to your breast chin first. They should take a large mouthful of breast. Your nipple should go towards the roof of their mouth.
Where can I find out more information?

HERE ARE 4 WAYS:

1. PHONE
   Maternal and Child Health service by calling Community Health Intake (CHI) 6207 9977
   healthdirect 1800 022 222
   Australian Breastfeeding Association 1800 Mum 2 Mum OR 1800 686 268

2. ATTEND
   ‘Early Days’ Group (infants up to 3 months of age) for assessment and ongoing breastfeeding information and support.
   Contact CHI for locations and times.

3. VISIT

4. SEE YOUR GP

Accessibility

The ACT Government is committed to making its information, services, events and venues, accessible to as many people as possible.

- If you have difficulty reading a standard printed document and would like to receive this publication in an alternative format, such as large print or audio, please telephone 13 2281 or email HealthACT@act.gov.au.
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- If you are deaf or hearing impaired and require the TTY typewriter service, please telephone 133 677, then ask for 132 281.
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REFERENCES


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