



Lactation Suppression

Once your milk supply is established, abruptly stopping breastfeeding causes certain physical changes to occur in your body. It is best to slowly wean down your breastfeeding slowly over several weeks time rather than stopping suddenly. Your breasts will continue to produce milk for a while even when tapering slowly, and if some isn't removed, you may become engorged, and possibly develop mastitis or inflammation of the breasts. If you stop "cold turkey" you may also experience a sudden drop in prolactin levels, which may cause feelings of a down mood or depression.

Here are some suggestions that may minimize your discomfort, and avoid potential problems.

1. **Don't bind your breasts.** This is an old fashioned idea which is no longer recommended because it can make you very uncomfortable, and may cause plugged ducts and mastitis. Using drugs to "dry up" the milk is also not done anymore because they are not very effective, and they can cause serious side effects.
2. **Wear a supportive (but not tight) bra** for general support. Choose clothing that is less likely to show wet spots if you leak, and wear nursing pads to absorb leaking milk.
3. Drink to thirst. **Restricting fluids doesn't help.**
4. **Cut down on salt intake.** Salt causes your body to retain fluids.
5. Take 50 mg of **vitamin B6** three times each day for 5 days to help relieve engorgement.
6. **Sage** tea contains a natural form of estrogen and can decrease your supply and help dry up your milk. You can buy it at the health food store, or use the spice from your kitchen. Take 1 tsp of rubbed sage with 1 cup of hot water and let it steep for about 15 minutes. You will want to add some milk or honey to it as it is very bitter. 3-4 ml every 6 hours usually dries up the milk quickly and goes down a little faster than the tea. The tincture is more readily absorbed in the mucous membranes, so it is somewhat more efficient at decreasing your milk supply.
7. **Cabbage leaf compresses** are a home remedy that has been used for over a hundred years to reduce engorgement and dry up milk. Here's how to use them: Buy plain green cabbage. Rinse and dry leaves. Put them in the refrigerator. Remove base of hard core vein and gently pound leaves. Wrap around breast and areola, leaving nipple exposed. The leaves fit nicely around the breast, and the cold feels good. Cover entire breast, and if needed, the area under your arms. Change every 30 minutes or sooner if the leaves become wilted.
8. Don't be afraid to **relieve your discomfort by expressing some small quantities of milk.** Express just enough to soften your breasts a bit, but

not enough to empty them completely or your body will get the message to continue to produce more milk to replenish the supply as if you were still breastfeeding. A warm shower will help relieve the discomfort of full breasts, and is a good place to express a little milk to relieve the fullness.

How often you express should be determined by your comfort level. Always go as long as you can before pumping (or hand expressing) and take out as little milk as possible. If you have been pumping every 3 hours, start out by pumping every 4 hours, then every 6, then every 8, then every 12, etc. If you have been pumping 6 ounces at each session, pump 4 ounces, then 3, then 2, etc. By gradually expressing less milk less and less often your supply will decrease without causing physical problems for you.

The amount of time it takes for your milk to dry up depends on how full a supply you have built up. If you have very little milk when you wean, it may be possible to quit cold turkey with a minimum of discomfort. For most mothers, a more gradual approach is recommended. If you have a full supply when you wean, and you taper off gradually, you should be able to stop expressing completely within 2-3 weeks, and often sooner. It is normal for you to be able to express a few drops of milk or have a little leaking for weeks or months after you stop nursing.

If you would like to **donate the milk you express** during this time, or any you might have frozen, you can contact one of the milk banks around the country. They provide milk for sick or premature infants whose mothers are unable to provide milk for them. Check the website for the Human Milk Banking Association of North America for a list of milk banks in your area – www.hmbana.org.

9. **Avoid manual contact with the breasts** such as massage or nipple stimulation during intercourse as this stimulates milk production as well.