

Nipple shields

A nipple shield is a thin flexible silicone cover which a mother places over her nipple before breastfeeding her infant.

Common reasons for use

Nipple shields are commonly used to assist with:

- an infant attaching to the breast when a mother has flat or inverted nipples
- sore and/or cracked nipples that have not responded to all other strategies
- sucking difficulties that have not responded to other management strategies
- enticing an infant who may be used to a bottle teat back to the breast
- feeding preterm infants at the breast.

Using a nipple shield

Nipple shields come in different sizes. It is important for them to be fitted to suit the size of individual mothers' nipples, otherwise milk flow can be impeded and they can cause nipple damage.

Nipple shields must be put on the breast correctly to optimise milk removal and comfort. It is therefore important to observe a breastfeed when a mother begins using a nipple shield to ensure the infant is able to remove milk well and the mother's comfort is maintained. Mothers can be encouraged to attend a **local Australian Breastfeeding Association group meeting** or see a **lactation consultant** for this purpose.

In most cases, use of a nipple shield is temporary. Some mothers find they only need to use the nipple shield in the early days while their infant is learning to breastfeed.

Weaning off nipple shields

Some infants are reluctant to breastfeed without a nipple shield once the need for their use ceases. For such infants, the following tips can help:

- Remove the nipple shield part way through the breastfeed (eg after the milk-ejection reflex starts)
- Skin-to-skin contact between the mother and the infant when breastfeeding
- Allowing the infant to use their instincts to find their mother's breasts (ie baby-led attachment)
- Offering the infant a breastfeed as soon as they wake from a sleep or when they start showing feeding cues such as turning their head from side to side, sticking their tongue out, wriggling, or bringing their hands to their mouth.

Resources

Australian Breastfeeding Association 2019, *Nipple shields*, Retrieved 18/1/20 from: <https://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/bfinfo/nipple-shields>

Brodribb, W. (ed) 2019, *Breastfeeding Management in Australia*. 5th ed. Australian Breastfeeding Association, Victoria.



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