

# Lactation Suppression and Milk Production Following Perinatal Loss or Other Maternal Reasons

- Hormones signal the body to produce milk. Colostrum may be present in the breast prior to or right after birth.
- Milk production usually begins 24 to 96 hours after birth, even if pregnancy has not reached full term due to perinatal loss or other maternal reasons.

## Options for Managing Lactation

### Suppression —How to Help Your Body Stop Lactating or Making Milk

- Without breastfeeding or pumping of the breast, milk production (lactation) eventually stops on its own. It is the excess milk in the breast that signals the body to produce less.
- You may experience engorged breasts (breast overfull with milk), leakage of milk, discomfort and pain due to the milk production.
- Some treatments which may be useful for suppressing milk production are:
  - ◇ wearing a well fitted bra, both day and night
  - ◇ using pads on the breast for leaking
  - ◇ applying ice packs every hour for 15 minutes to reduce swelling and pain
  - ◇ having a hot bath or shower for comfort
  - ◇ using alternative treatments such as applying jasmine flower or cabbage leaves to the chest.

### Milk Expression, Pumping, or Donating

Milk expression or pumping and/or donation may be an option. This may not be possible if your health status and medications prevent you from donating.

- If pumping or feeding is established, then you can gradually stop expressing/pumping or express/pump for comfort only.
  - ◇ Only hand express or pump a small amount for comfort.
  - ◇ Decrease the number of times you pump each day as you are able. For example, take away 1 pumping session each day.
- You may be able to express/pump the milk and discard or donate it.
- Refrain from taking naproxen if you plan on donating your milk.
- Donating breastmilk to benefit other newborns may help with your grief.
- Talk to your health care provider if this is an option you would like to explore.

## Medication for Lactation Suppression— Taking Cabergoline to Stop Lactating or Making Milk

- This medication is approved by Health Canada for milk suppression and is used to suppress prolactin which is a hormone related to milk production.
- There is weak evidence that this medication is better than natural suppression in the first week after a birth or pregnancy.
- Parents in one study strongly recommend this medication be provided to people needing to stop milk production.
- It is prescribed as one dose within 24 hours after birth or pregnancy to reduce the amount of milk.
- Do not take this drug if:
  - ◊ you have an allergy to cabergoline or similar medication
  - ◊ you have high blood pressure
  - ◊ you have heart or lung problems.
- Other side effects include constipation, nausea, dizziness and feeling tired and weak.
- Rare side effects can occur such as an allergic reaction (rash, hives, difficulty breathing), signs of kidney problems such as being unable to void and pain.

### Resources

Milk Donating Northern Star Milk Bank <http://northernstarmilkbank.ca/>

Empty Arms Bereavement Support. (n.d.). Lactation After Loss. Retrieved from [https:// motherwear.typepad.com/files/final-us-lactation-after-loss-brochure.pdf%20](https://motherwear.typepad.com/files/final-us-lactation-after-loss-brochure.pdf%20)