



Australian
Breastfeeding
Association

For Health
Professionals

Nipple shields

A nipple shield is a thin flexible silicone cover which a mother places over her nipple and areola before breastfeeding her infant. They can be helpful in some cases of nipple pain or attachment problems.^{1,2}

Common reasons for use

Nipple shields are commonly used to help:

- an infant attach to a flat or inverted nipple
- heal sore and/or cracked nipples
- address infant sucking difficulties
- entice a bottle-fed infant back to the breast
- feed preterm infants at the breast.

Other simple management strategies that can be explored before a nipple shield is recommended include manual stimulation to draw out a flat/inverted nipple, careful positioning and attachment to address sore nipples, and skin-to-skin contact to encourage a reluctant infant to breastfeed.

Current research suggests that milk production, milk transfer and infant growth are not directly impacted when a mother uses a nipple shield to help address ongoing nipple pain.^{3,4} However, persistent pain that interferes with breastfeeding may reduce breastfeeding frequency, leading to a reduction in infant milk intake.⁵ Longer term use of nipple shields also has the potential to create dependency.⁶ This highlights the need for ongoing skilled lactation support for mothers using nipple shields.

Using a nipple shield

Nipple shields come in various sizes. It is important for them to be fitted to suit the size of an individual mother's nipples. A poorly fitting nipple shield may impede milk flow and cause nipple damage.

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

Nipple shield use is temporary in most cases. Many mothers find they only need to use the nipple shield in the early days while their infant is learning to breastfeed. While using a nipple shield, mothers should be encouraged to look for signs that their infant is **getting enough breastmilk**.



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Further reading

Brodribb, W. (Ed.). (2019). Lactation aids. In *Breastfeeding Management in Australia* (5th ed., pp. 399–417). Australian Breastfeeding Association.

ABA Professional Feature Article, **Nipple shield use**.

Resources for families

Information for families can be found by searching for 'nipple shields' on the Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) website, breastfeeding.asn.au

Women with breastfeeding concerns that result in the use of a nipple shield often require additional breastfeeding support. ABA breastfeeding counsellors do not provide medical advice. However, a call to the National Breastfeeding Helpline on 1800 686 268 can provide reassurance, support, and practical suggestions to support continued breastfeeding.

Weaning off a nipple shield

Some infants are reluctant to breastfeed without a nipple shield once it is no longer needed. The following tips may help:

- Encourage the mother to hold her baby skin to skin when breastfeeding.
- Allow the infant to use their instincts to find the breast (i.e. baby-led attachment).
- Offer the infant a breastfeed as soon as they wake from a sleep, or when they make early feeding cues (such as turning their head from side to side, sticking their tongue out, wriggling, or bringing their hands to their mouth).
- Begin the breastfeed with the nipple shield, then remove it after the milk-ejection reflex occurs.

References

1. Chertok I. R. (2009). **Reexamination of ultra-thin nipple shield use, infant growth and maternal satisfaction**. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 18(21), 2949–2955.
2. Hanna, S., Wilson, M., & Norwood, S. (2013). **A description of breast-feeding outcomes among U.S. mothers using nipple shields**. *Midwifery*, 29(6), 616–621.
3. Coentro, V. S., Perrella, S. L., Lai, C. T., Rea, A., Dymock, M., & Geddes, D. T. (2021). **Nipple shield use does not impact sucking dynamics in breastfeeding infants of mothers with nipple pain**. *European Journal of Pediatrics*, 180(5), 1537–1543.
4. Coentro, V. S., Perrella, S. L., Lai, C. T., Rea, A., Murray, K., & Geddes, D. T. (2021). **Impact of nipple shield use on milk transfer and maternal nipple pain**. *Breastfeeding Medicine*, 16(3), 222–229.
5. Coentro, V. S., Lai, C. T., Rea, A., Turlach, B., Geddes, D. T., & Perrella, S. L. (2022). **Breast milk production in women who use nipple shields for persistent nipple pain**. *Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic, and Neonatal Nursing*, 51(1), 73–82.
6. Kronborg, H., Foverskov, E., Nilsson, I., & Maastrup, R. (2017). **Why do mothers use nipple shields and how does this influence duration of exclusive breastfeeding?** *Maternal & Child Nutrition*, 13(1), e12251.