

Reverse Pressure Softening

New mothers often have swollen areolas (areas of darker skin around the nipple) in the first week after delivery. Many mothers find it hard to get the baby to properly latch because of swelling in the areola. Reverse pressure softening is an easy and effective way to soften the areola by moving the fluid causing the swelling backward and upward into the breast, at least for a short time. By making the areola soft right before feedings, your baby will have an easier time latching on deeply and also getting more milk. Many moms also find that softening the areola makes feedings more comfortable and reduces the risk of damaging the nipples. Here are two easy ways:

Method 1 – using two hands

1. Comfortably lie down or lean back so that your breasts are flat against your chest.
2. Press your fingertips around the base (bottom) of your nipple (choose either finger placement that is comfortable for you (A or B)).
3. Press gently and firmly for 30 to 50 seconds.
4. After 30 to 50 seconds, drag your fingers away from your nipple while still pressing gently.
5. Continue the process by switching your finger positions around your nipple.
6. Repeat until your areola has softened.

Method 2 – one-handed “flower hold”

1. Comfortably lie down or lean back so that your breasts are flat against your chest.
2. Curve your fingertips around the base (bottom) of your nipple (your fingernails must be short to do this) and press gently and firmly for 50 seconds or longer if your breast is very swollen.

Reverse Pressure Softening Tips

- Soften the areola right before each feeding (or pumping) until latching is always easy.
- Be gentle to avoid pain, but press firmly and steadily.
- Reverse pressure softening softens the breast for about 5 to 10 minutes before the swelling returns, so it is important to latch the baby on or pump before your breast becomes firm or swollen again.
- The more swollen or engorged you are, the more time it may take to soften.

If you need to pump milk for your baby

- Always soften the areola first before you pump.
- Use only medium or low vacuum so swelling won't move back into the areola.
- Pause during pumping to soften the areola one or two more times to get more milk out.

A



B



C



Call the 24-Hour Breastfeeding Hotline or your breastfeeding support provider if ...

- You are unable to soften the areola for a good latch
- Breastfeeding is painful
- Swelling lasts for more than 1 week

This handout is based on Reverse Pressure Softening technique developed by K. Jean Cotterman RNC-E, IBCLC.



24-Hour Breastfeeding Hotline
1-800-833-4642

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