

Nipple Shields

Breastfeeding works best and most easily when no gadgets are used. But sometimes a gadget can help gadget-free breastfeeding develop. A nipple shield is one such gadget.

The nipple shield looks something like a clear Mexican hat. The "tip" is the hat's crown. The "rim" is the hat's brim. To use a nipple shield most effectively, turn it almost completely inside out, so that half of the tip is inverted. Moisten the underside of the rim (the side that will be against the breast), either with water or by licking it. Or put a dab of Lansinoh® in several spots on the underside of the rim, to act as glue when the nipple shield is in place. Center the tip over your nipple, and put the shield against your skin. Push the part over your nipple to one side, or tug it gently, and it will pop back into its normal shape, drawing some of your nipple into the tip. Your baby's sucking will finish drawing your nipple out.

Tickle your baby's upper lip with the tip. When he opens WIDE, draw him in close. It's easy for him to nibble onto the shield. That doesn't work with a real nipple, so try not to let him do it with the shield. Instead, when his mouth is OPEN, snuggle his shoulders close to you, so that when his mouth closes, his gums close beyond where the tip joins the rim. This is a big mouthful, but a baby normally fills his mouth with at least this much breast tissue. He can do it. If he gags, that may be part of the reason he's had some trouble with breastfeeding. Keep encouraging him to take a big, big mouthful. If needed, start with a smaller "premie" size nipple shield.

If he takes a good, big mouthful, he should be able to milk your breast about as well as without the shield. If your baby swallows after every one or two sucks, your breast softens, and your baby lets go and is too full to take any more for 10 minutes or so (most babies love to come back for seconds after a few minutes' rest), you probably won't have to pump. But stay in touch with a breastfeeding specialist while you're using the shield. Some of the time its use causes milk supply problems.

If your baby must suck 3 or more times for every swallow, and wants to nurse almost constantly, perhaps with his eyes closed, the shield may be interfering with milk transfer. Pump after nursing, offer the extra milk to your baby, and stay in touch with a breastfeeding specialist. The pumping will help keep your supply strong and your baby well-fed while you work through these early problems.

If the shield curls over your baby's nose while he's nursing, but he stays well-positioned, don't worry about it. A curling shield is more of a concern for the mother than for the baby. You might try keeping the shield in place with a few strips of hairdresser's tape. (Use long pieces so you'll know if they begin to be sucked off!)

Remember, babies breastfeed; they don't nipplefeed. If the shield makes your baby suck only your nipple, something needs to change. But if the shield and baby are well-positioned, it may be the gadget that helps you get rid of the gadgets.