

Nipple Shields

When and How to Use Them

Breasts and nipples come in all shapes and sizes. Most babies, if given the chance, will learn to breastfeed on their mother's breasts, but nipple size and shape can make breastfeeding easier or harder for some babies.

Mothers who are concerned about the size or shape of their nipples can often ease their fears by doing a Pinch Test. The Pinch Test is designed to help mothers decide if their nipples are everted (stand out), flat, or inverted (sink in).

Pinch test

Place your thumb and finger on the areola (the darker part of the breast around the nipple). Your thumb and finger should be near, but not touching, the base of the nipple. Gently press your thumb and finger together. When gently pinched, an everted nipple will protrude or stand out, a flat nipple will remain flat, and an inverted nipple will retract or sink in. Truly inverted nipples are rare. Even more rare are mothers with two inverted nipples.

When to use a nipple shield

A nipple shield is a thin silicone device that covers the nipple and the areola. Babies who might benefit from the use of a nipple shield include:

- premature babies who cannot sustain a latch,
- babies who prefer a bottle nipple and refuse to breastfeed, and
- babies of mothers with flat or inverted nipples.



Everted nipple



Flat nipple



Inverted nipple

If your baby has trouble latching onto your breast AND one or both of your nipples are flat or inverted, use a breast pump before each breastfeeding to gently pull your nipple out. If that approach doesn't work, try using a nipple shield.

Once your baby is able to latch on and breastfeed effectively, flat or inverted nipples will gradually come out (evert) and stay out. Until then, a nipple shield can give your baby something to latch on to. A nipple shield can be used at the start of a feeding and then removed once the baby starts to suckle and swallow, or it can be used throughout the feeding.

It's important to remember that nipple shields are designed for short-term use. Once your baby is able to latch on and breastfeed effectively, a nipple shield should no longer be used.

What size nipple shield to use

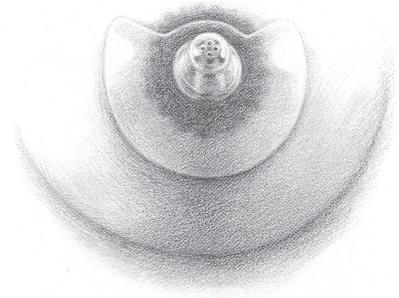
Nipple shields, like babies, come in several sizes. Your health care provider, lactation consultant, or breastfeeding counselor will help you choose a nipple shield that is the right size for you and your baby. You will know that you are using the right size if both your nipple and the shield covering it fit into your baby's mouth. If the shield is too large, your baby will have difficulty maintaining a proper latch and will be more likely to gag. If your nipple touches the top of the raised portion of the shield (the crown), the shield is too small. Most newborns do best with a size "small" nipple shield.

How to use a nipple shield

Place the nipple shield in warm water prior to use—a moist shield is more likely to stay in place during breastfeeding. Some mothers prefer to express a few drops of breast milk onto the back of the nipple shield prior to positioning it on the breast.



Pinch test



Nipple shield in use

Hold the nipple shield by the outside edges and gently stretch the shield. Center the stretched shield over the nipple and place it on the breast, drawing the nipple and the areola (the darker part around the nipple) into the raised portion of the shield.

Some nipple shields have a “cut-out,” while other shields are completely round. If you are using a shield with a “cut-out,” position the cutout beneath the baby’s nose.

Tickle your baby’s nose with your shield-covered nipple. When he opens his mouth WIDE, gently bring him toward your breast. If necessary, hold the nipple shield in place with your thumb and finger.

Mothers of babies who are unable to achieve a good latch often use a nipple shield at the start of each feeding. After a minute or two, they remove the shield and offer the breast without the shield. Try this approach with each breastfeeding until your baby is able to latch on without the shield.

How to clean and care for nipple shields

Care for a nipple shield the same way you care for other breastfeeding equipment. After each use, rinse the nipple shield in cold water, then wash in hot, soapy water and rinse well. Store in a clean, dry place.

An important reminder

Be sure to talk with your health care provider before using a nipple shield. Too often, nipple shields are used as a substitute for encouragement and support. If you and your health care provider decide that a nipple shield is needed, be sure to weigh your baby frequently (at least once a week) while using the shield. Because a nipple shield can interfere with milk transfer in some babies, regular weight checks will help ensure that your baby is getting enough to eat.



Tickle your baby’s nose with your shield-covered nipple. When he opens his mouth wide, gently bring him toward your breast. If necessary, hold the nipple shield in place with your thumb and finger.