



Nipple Shields

When and how to use them

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

Pinch test

The Pinch test will help you decide if your nipples are everted (stand out), flat, or inverted (sink in). Place your thumb and finger on your areola (the darker part of the breast around the nipple) near the base of your nipple. Gently press your thumb and finger together—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.

If one or both of your nipples are flat or inverted AND your baby is unable to latch on and breastfeed, pumping your breast before each feeding may pull your nipple out. If that doesn't work, you may want to try a nipple shield.

Nipple shield

A nipple shield is a thin silicone device that covers the nipple and the areola. Like babies, nipple shields come in more than one size. You will know that you are using the right size shield if your nipple and the shield covering it fit inside your baby's mouth. If your baby can't stay latched or gags (chokes), the shield may be too large. If your nipple touches the top of the raised portion of the shield (the crown), the shield may be too small. Most newborns do best with a size "small" shield. Babies who might benefit from the use of a nipple shield include:

- premature babies who cannot maintain a latch
- babies who prefer a bottle nipple and refuse the breast
- babies of mothers with flat or inverted nipples



Pinch test



Nipple shield

How to use

Since a moist shield is more likely to stay in place, rinse the shield in warm water or express a few drops of breast milk onto the back of the shield before placing it on your breast.

Hold the nipple shield by the outside edges and gently stretch the shield. Center the stretched shield over your nipple and onto your breast, drawing the nipple and the areola 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 cut-out beneath the baby’s nose or chin.

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.

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. Once your baby is able to latch on and breastfeed well, flat or inverted nipples will usually come out, and you can stop using the shield.

Rinse your shield in cool water after each use, and in hot, soapy water once a day. Store in a clean, dry place.

An important reminder

Talk with your health care provider before using a nipple shield. More often than not, encouragement and support is all that is needed. If you decide to use a shield, know that it can interfere with milk transfer in some babies. So be sure to weigh your baby each week to ensure that he is getting enough to eat.

Copyright © 2020 Amy Spangler. All rights reserved.



Nipple shield in use