

## *Nipple Shield*

*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 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. You may want to moisten the underside of the rim (the side that goes against the breast), either with water or by licking it. Center the tip over your nipple, then smooth the rim against your breast. Gently tug or bend the tip, 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. It often helps to use the 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. Premies, who can have trouble maintaining a big mouthful of breast, may actually take more milk with a shield than without it. 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. A few weight checks will help you know how well it's working.

**If your baby must suck 3 or more times for every swallow**, and wants to nurse almost constantly, perhaps with his eyes closed, milk isn't transferring well. Recheck your baby's placement, 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 and your helper work through the problem.

**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.

**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 and your baby swallows well with it, it may be the gadget that helps you get rid of the gadgets.

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## *How To Use a Nipple Shield*

**Use:** To wear the nipple shield, turn the rim toward the tip of the shield's nipple. Apply a very small amount of water, lanolin, lubricating jelly, or ointment under the rim. It is best not to use too much so that none will get into the nipple part of the shield. Gently pull on your own nipple to make it protrude. Place the shield's nipple over your own nipple, getting your nipple as far as you can into the shield's nipple, and then roll the rim onto your breast.

After your baby is positioned comfortably and ready to latch on, support the weight of your breast with your fingers. Position your thumb on your breast where the baby's nose will be and your index finger where your baby's chin will be. Use your index finger and thumb to hold the rim of the shield. Compress your breast with your index finger and your thumb so that your breast will fit into your baby's mouth. The baby's lips need to be well beyond the base of the shield's nipple.

Once the baby has taken the breast with the shield and has fed well for several minutes, take the baby off the breast, remove the shield, and try to latch the baby on at the breast. If it does not work, replace the shield and allow the baby to feed until he/she comes off the breast on his/her own.

**Concerns:** The Medela nipple shield, used as an aid to help your baby learn to latch on to your breast, is best used as a temporary breastfeeding aid and in most cases should be discontinued as soon as possible. Some older studies indicate that the use of a nipple shield may result in a low milk supply. If the baby does not latch well to a nipple shield, it can also result in low-weight gain and a subsequent low-milk supply. Therefore, it is important to pump your breasts after your daytime feedings with a hospital-quality electric breast pump to ensure a good milk supply. The Medela Lactina<sup>®</sup> and Symphony<sup>®</sup> are excellent rental pumps. (Most mothers find the breastpumps that are available for sale are not as effective for establishing a milk supply.)

If you are not pumping with the hospital-grade electric breast pump, it is important to monitor your baby's weight gain twice a week, and weekly even if you are using a hospital-grade breast pump.

**Two more concerns:** Your baby may become used to breastfeeding with the nipple shield and resist breastfeeding directly on your breast and the shield may irritate your skin.

**Cleaning:** The nipple shield should be washed in hot soapy water and rinsed well after each use. The nipple shield may be boiled, if you wish to sterilize it (as long as your baby is healthy, it does not need to be sterilized – only clean).

