

Nipple Shields

What is a nipple shield?



Nipple shields

A nipple shield is a flexible silicone nipple that is worn over the mom's nipple during a feeding. Nipple shields should in general be considered a short-term solution and should be used under the guidance of a lactation consultant.

Often, nipple shields are recommended within the first few days of birth. Frequently in these cases, the shields are not needed and are handed out without proper instructions for using and weaning from them – a shield should generally not be used during the first week after birth unless there is an obvious problem such as prematurity or difficulty latching which is attributable to some physical characteristic of the baby

Disadvantages to using a nipple shield

- Baby may get less milk if the shield is used incorrectly
- Mom may be more at risk for plugged ducts and mastitis (if the shield causes reduced milk transfer)
- It can be difficult to wean from the shield

Advantages to using a nipple shield

Although nipple shields should be used only after other options have been tried, it is better to have a baby on the breast with a shield than not on the breast at all!

What type of nipple shield is best?

If you're using a shield, the thin clear silicon type of nipple shield is the best to use. There is also a variety of shield with a cutout that allows for more skin-to-skin contact than the typical shield. If you're using a rubber shield, seriously consider getting a silicone one instead. Using a baby bottle nipple on the breast is never a good recommendation.

What precautions should be taken when using a nipple shield?

Here are a couple of things to keep an eye on until baby is weaned from the shield.

- When using a shield you'll need to carefully assess your baby for adequate intake. Make sure you are seeing milk in the shield. Count the wet diapers every day and make sure that he's having at least 6 really wet ones each 24 hour period. You also will want to make sure that he stools at least three times daily if he is less than 5-6 weeks of age. After 5-6 weeks, his stools may come less often, but should still be loose and profuse even if more time has passed. Baby will also need to be weighed frequently – at least every 2 weeks (make sure you use the same scale) – until it is clear that he is gaining well.
- You will also want to listen for frequent swallowing during the feeding and feel for overall good breast softening after the feeding. If your breasts are not well-softened after each feeding, you may need to pump until they are softened to ensure that your supply remains adequate. This will lessen your risk for plugged ducts and help to maintain your supply.

Weaning from a nipple shield

Nipple shields are like training wheels for a breastfeeding baby. When your baby is sucking and swallowing well, and when you feel confident, eventually there will come a time you may want to wean from using the nipple shield and nurse directly on your skin. Once your baby swallows consistently throughout a feeding and you are more comfortable with latching, it may be your time to wean from it. The baby's growing suction and pressure pulls your nipple further into the shield chamber and milk will be seen consistently in the shield tip. It can take anywhere from several days to several weeks to accomplish completely weaning from the shield. Frequent contact or support with a board certified lactation consultant can help with this process.

Here are some suggested ways to wean from shield use:

- Some mothers found that their babies were eager to eat at the beginning of a breastfeeding, but that they fell asleep before they had taken enough milk. These mothers started the feedings without the shield, and put it on once the babies started to fall asleep, so that the babies would feed for a longer time.
- Before placing a shield on the nipple, many mothers have found that hand expressing or pumping some breastmilk first may encourage the baby to start suckling once brought to the breast.
- Try offering the breast several times without the nipple shield, particularly when baby is rather sleepy rather than ravenously hungry. Try to notice if there are certain feeding times during the day or certain breastfeeding positions that the baby may prefer and try breastfeeding without the shield during these times.
- After baby is nursing well and let-down has occurred, attempt to remove the shield quickly and re-latch baby. Very gradually,

start to remove it earlier and earlier in the feeding until you feel confident baby is swallowing well and you don't need it at all.

- Sometimes it works to offer the first breast with the shield and the second one without it.
- In between feedings or before it is time to start the feeding, mothers and babies benefit from being skin to skin and taking time to snuggle. This may even help to stimulate your supply and to ease the latching.
- If baby becomes upset as you are trying, stop and attempt to calm him before trying again.
- If baby doesn't take the breast without the shield relatively easily, give it to him with the shield. DO NOT allow him to become frustrated at the breast, that will only make him more resistant to breastfeeding. Allow baby to build trust that nursing will work and will be ok, even if that means using the shield to make it familiar and easy for him. Once he builds trust, start to remove the shield after he has been on for awhile.
- If you are still having a hard time, work with a board certified lactation consultant to achieve weaning and to make sure your baby is adequately gaining weight.

(Adapted Reference: kellymom.com & mlhs.org)