Using a Nipple Shield

A nipple shield is worn over the mother’s nipple during breastfeeding. Nipple shields are usually considered a short-term solution and should be used with the guidance of a breastfeeding support person or health care provider. It is important to use only a nipple shield made of thin, flexible silicone.

Nipple shields may be useful for:
• A baby with trouble latching on to the breast
• A mother with flat or inverted nipples
• Premature babies
• Babies with tongue-tie
• Babies with trouble nursing due to medications given during labor

Sometimes a mother using a nipple shield has less milk production because of decreased sucking sensation to the breast when the baby breastfeeds. Your breastfeeding resource person can help you with suggestions to keep your milk supply maximized.

When using a nipple shield we suggest you:
• Provide frequent skin to skin contact with your baby.
• Listen for infant’s swallowing during the feeding.
• Check to see that your breasts are softer after feedings.
• Keep a feeding diary and make sure the baby is having enough wet and soiled diapers. (See handout “Baby is getting enough breastmilk when…”)
• Discuss keeping track of your baby’s weight with your health care provider and breastfeeding support person.

How to place the shield on your nipple:
• Placing breastmilk or lanolin on the inside of the flat part of the shield helps it to “stick” to the areola.
• Turn shield partially “inside out” before placing it on the nipple. Then let it unfold, drawing the nipple into the shield.
• If the shield has a cut-out portion, place it where baby’s nose will be at the breast.

Care of the shield:
• Wash the shield with hot soapy water and air dry after each use.
• Store dry shield in a clean dry place such as a small covered plastic container.

Tips for weaning your baby from the shield:
• Before nursing, massage your breasts and express a few drops of milk. This softens the areola, pulls out the nipple, and begins the milk flow.
• Attempt to latch your baby when your baby is sleepy and quietly alert, not overly hungry or crying.
• Try to latch your baby without the shield at some point during the middle of a feeding.
• Use the “breast sandwich” technique when latching. Compress your breast and hold it firmly about 1½ inches from the base of your nipple. Holding the breast this way makes your nipple more firm. Keep holding it like that until it feels like baby is sucking well, and then slowly release the grip.
• If your baby lets go of the breast, repeat the steps for latch.

Be patient. Keep the feeding times pleasant. Weaning from the nipple shield may be a gradual process. Remember your goal: Feeding your baby with the very best, your breastmilk.