

Reverse Pressure Softening for Parents

Developed by K. Jean Cotterman RNC, IBCLC

What is it?

REVERSE PRESSURE SOFTENING is a way to soften the **circle around your nipple (the a-re-o-la)** to make latching and getting your milk out easy while your baby and you are learning. **LATCHING SHOULDN'T BE PAINFUL.** If your **areola** is soft enough to **change shape** while feeding, it helps your baby **gently extend your nipple deep inside his mouth**, so his tongue and jaws can press on milk ducts under the **areola**.

(These motions differ from those that artificial nipples force a baby to use.)

This new method is **NOT THE SAME** as removing milk with your fingers. **DON'T EXPECT MILK TO COME FROM YOUR NIPPLE** while you soften your **areola** this way. (But it's OK if some milk does come out.)

When is it helpful?

Try **REVERSE PRESSURE SOFTENING** in the early days after birth if you begin to notice firmness of the **areola**, latch pain, or breast fullness. (This full feeling is **only partly due to milk**. Delayed or skipped feedings may also cause **the tissue around your milk ducts** to hold extra fluid much like a sponge does. **This fluid never goes to your baby.**) **Intravenous (IV) fluids**, or drugs such as **pitocin** may cause even more retained tissue fluid, which often takes **7-14 days** to go away. **Avoid long pumping sessions and high vacuum settings on breast pumps to prevent extra swelling of the areola itself.**

Feel your **areola and the tissue deeper inside it**. Is it soft and easy to squeeze, like **your earlobe or your lip**? Or does it feel **FIRMER and harder to compress, like your chin**? If so, it's time to try **REVERSE PRESSURE SOFTENING** just before each time you offer your baby your breast. (Some mothers soften their **areola** before feeding, for a week or longer, till swelling goes down, baby can be heard swallowing milk regularly, and latching is always pain-free without softening first.)

Why does it work?

REVERSE PRESSURE SOFTENING briefly moves some swelling **backward and upward into your breast** to soften your **areola** so it can change shape and extend your nipple. It sends a **special signal to the back of your breasts to start moving milk forward (let-down reflex)** where your baby's tongue can reach it. It also makes it easy to remove milk with your fingertips or with **SHORT PERIODS OF SLOW GENTLE PUMPING**, combined with gentle forward massage of the upper breast, if you need to remove milk for your baby.

Where should I press?

It is most important to soften the **areola** in the whole **one-inch area all around where it joins your nipple**. Soften even more of the **areola** if you wish. You may also want to soften a place where your baby's chin will be able to move easily against the breast. **REVERSE PRESSURE SOFTENING** should cause **NO DISCOMFORT**.

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Illustrations by Kyle Cotterman, Reverse Pressure Softening by K. Jean Cotterman © 2008

How do I do Reverse Pressure Softening?

- You (or your helper, from in front, or behind you) choose one of the patterns pictured.
- Place the fingers/thumbs on the circle **touching the nipple**.
- (If swelling is very firm, lie down on your back, and/or ask someone to help by pressing his or her fingers on top of your fingers.)
- Push **gently but firmly** straight inward toward your ribs.
- Hold the pressure **steady** for a period of **1 to 3 full minutes**.
- Relax, breathe easy, sing a lullaby, listen to a favorite song or have someone else watch a clock or set a timer. To see your **areola** better, try using a hand mirror.
- It's OK to repeat the inward pressure again as often as you need. Deep "dimples" may form, lasting long enough for easy latching. Keep testing how soft your **areola** feels.
- You may also press with a soft ring made by cutting off half of an artificial nipple.
- Offer your baby your breast promptly while the circle is soft.



Figure 1 One handed "flower hold":
Fingernails short, Fingertips curved, placed
where baby's tongue will go.

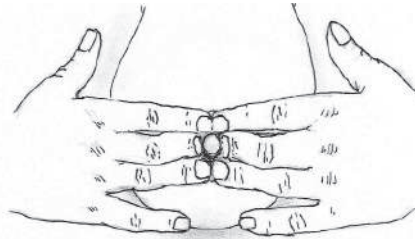


Figure 2 Two handed, one-step method:
Fingernails short, Fingertips curved, each
one touching the side of the nipple.



Figure 3 You may ask someone to help
press by placing fingers or thumbs on top
of yours.



Figure 4 Two step method, two hands:
using 2 or 3 straight fingers each side, first
knuckles touching nipple. Move ¼ turn,
repeat above and below nipple.

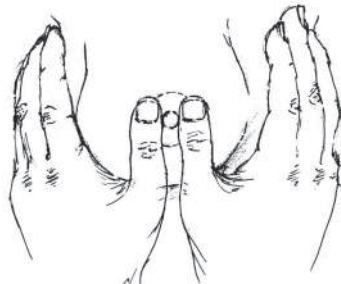


Figure 5 Two step method, two hands:
using straight thumbs, base of thumbnail at
side of nipple. Move ¼ turn, repeat, thumbs
above and below nipple.

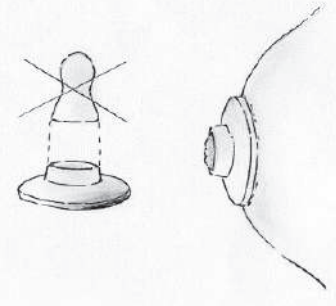


Figure 6 Soft ring method: Cut off bottom
half of an artificial nipple to place on areola
to press with fingers.