

Use of Cool Cabbage Compresses

Revival of an old remedy to treat breast engorgement and to relieve plugged milk ducts

Effect: Cool green cabbage compresses reduce inflammation and swelling. Just exactly how the compresses work is unknown. They are often used in Australian hospitals, and have recently made a comeback in North America.

Method: Use green cabbage (not red); core it and remove the leaves layer by layer. Wash carefully to remove any possible pesticides. Drain the leaves and shake off excess water. Store in a clean container in the fridge until use.

Treatment:

1. Crumple the leaves with your fingers – this releases the soothing and healing ingredients in the cabbage.
2. Layer the leaves around your breast(s) covering the entire breast, including the armpit if swollen. Lay a cool moist towel over the compresses and lie down and relax or sit in a relaxed position. You should find this to be both cooling and soothing.
3. Leave on as long as you have engorgement or for 24 hours.
4. Remove cabbage compresses and apply warm moist heat for about 10 min to help the milk flow. A few ways to do this are:
 - Have a hot shower, letting the water run freely over your breasts
 - Cover the entire breast and armpit with warm facecloths
 - Use a commercial product that releases moist heat when put in the microwave
5. Then, massage in a circular motion, all areas of your breast with the palm of your hand, moving from the chest wall down toward your nipple.
6. Finish by nursing your baby, expressing milk or using a breast pump. After feeding or expressing cabbage leaves can be reapplied.

This is one way that women have found the use of cabbage leaves to be helpful. If however you feel this is too much work in addition to feeding your baby and sleeping, follow steps 1 and 2 and remove cabbage leaves to feed or when engorgement has improved. Warmth or massage may help milk flow just prior to feeding if cabbage leaves were just removed but are not necessary.