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Cold cabbage leaves may be as good as cold gel packs for breast engorgement, and better than nothing at all

A randomised trial of cold cabbage leaves versus cold gel packs versus control<sup>1</sup> reported that cabbage leaves were as good as the gel packs at reduction in pain at three time points after application compared with a no treatment control group.

Additionally, cabbage leaves were superior to gel packs at all three time points following application for hardness of breasts. Both intervention groups were better than the control group for hardness of breasts.

The study had some methodological flaws in the design. For example, the cabbage leaves were applied to both breasts in the leaf group and it is unclear if the application was to one or both breasts for the gel pack.

There was high satisfaction with the cabbage leaves. The leaf intervention used 3 large leaves over each breast. The leaves were rinsed in cold water and chilled in a zip-lock bag in the freezer for 15 minutes, or the fridge for one hour. The cold gel packs were chilled like the leaves.

A Cochrane review had reported cabbage leaves as a promising intervention but more research needed. There was no difference in duration of breast feeding at 3 and 6 months.<sup>2</sup>

This Gem has been checked by Dr Karen Hoare Associate-Professor, Massey University.

*References:*

1. Application of cabbage leaves compared to gel packs for mothers with breast engorgement: Randomised controlled trial. Int J Nurse studies 2017. [Click here](#)

2. Treatments for breast engorgement during lactation. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2016. [Click here](#)

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