An appointment has been arranged for you on: ..............................................

At .................................................................

Further Information
If you are worried about your condition contact:
1. KHUH on ___________________

2. Your Primary Health Care Centre
What is the let-down reflex or milk ejection reflex?

When you breastfeed, your baby’s sucking stimulates nerves in your nipples. These nerves carry a message to your brain, and the hormone oxytocin is released from your pituitary gland. Oxytocin flows through your bloodstream to your breasts, where it causes muscle cells around your milk glands to pressurize milk out of the glands and into the milk ducts. This is known as the let-down reflex.

Once your let-down reflex is working well, usually 2 weeks after delivery, you may feel pins-and-needles or a tingling sensation in your breasts when you nurse or pump. Milk may drip from one breast while you are feeding on the other side. Sometimes your let-down reflex will occur when you hear your baby cry or think about nursing your baby. A well-functioning let-down reflex helps ensure your breasts get emptied and your baby easily obtains milk.

Sometimes a woman’s milk ejection reflex does not work as well as it should, causing breast feeding difficulties. For example, you may have problems emptying milk from your breasts, or your baby may not get enough milk.

What causes a poor let-down reflex?

Several situations may prevent the milk ejection reflex from working well, such as:

- The severely sore nipples that cause you to become tense before each nursing.
- Stress, anxiety and tension for e.g. trying to pump breast milk during a short break at work.
- Being separated from baby for example, having a premature infant who is unable to nurse, making it necessary for you to use a pump to express breast milk.
- Previous breast surgery that has damaged the normal nerve pathways to the nipple, such as breast reduction or enlargement surgery. If you have altered sensation in your nipple after surgery (your nipple is somewhat numb or super-sensitive), it is possible that nerve damage from the procedure could interfere with your milk ejection reflex.

How can I trigger the let-down reflex and improve my milk flow?

The following suggestions can help.

- Try to nurse or pump in a place that is familiar, comfortable and restful.
- Drink a beverage whenever you sit down to nurse or pump.
- Play soft music or do relaxation exercises before you nurse or pump.
- Gently massage your breasts before you nurse or pump.
- Put a warm washcloth or heating pad on your breasts, or take warm shower before you nurse.
- If you are pumping because you are separated from your infant, put a photograph of your baby by the pump.

Are there medical alternatives to improving my milk flow?

A compounding pharmacist can make a synthetic (man-made) form of oxytocin with a physician’s prescription.