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## Expressing and Storing Breast Milk

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Learning how to express breast milk is an important skill for mothers. Expressing breast milk allows you to:

- Keep your nipples moist and prevent infections by rubbing milk onto your nipples.
- Help your baby to find your nipple. Your baby could be very interested in feeding but struggling to locate your nipple. The smell and taste of the milk can help with this.
- Soften your areola to allow your baby to latch more deeply.
- Collect and store your milk to feed your baby when you cannot be with her.

### Expressing Breast Milk

You can practice expressing breast milk as soon as your baby is born or even before. In the first 2-3 days after birth, you will get a small amount of colostrum. Colostrum is rich in antibodies and nutrients. It is an excellent food for newborns and gives your baby's immune system an important boost.

Whether you are hand expressing or using a pump, it may take a few minutes for your milk to flow. At times, your milk will come faster, then slower, then faster again. This is normal. With practice, you will find out what works best for you.

### Getting Ready

When you are ready to express your milk, try to relax so that your milk will flow easily. Always wash your hands before expressing milk. You can try some or all of these things to see what works best for you:

- Put a warm, wet cloth around your breasts, or have a shower to start the let-down reflex that helps your milk flow.
- Choose a place where you are comfortable. You may want a place where you have privacy.
- Relax by thinking about your baby, listening to music, or watching something you enjoy on television.
- Massage your breasts to help the milk to come down. There are different ways to do this. You can massage in a circular motion with your fingers together. Or, you can support your breast with one hand, and stroke the other side of your breast firmly with your other hand. Always go from the chest towards the nipple, and work all around the breast.
- Lean forward and gently stroke the breast.
- Gently roll your nipple with your thumb and finger.



## Expressing by Hand

Expressing by hand is convenient and free. Try the following tips:

- Use a clean container with a wide opening. Put it on a surface in front of you or hold it under your breast to collect the milk.
- Hold your breast with one hand, not too close to the nipple. The thumb and fingers of your hand should be opposite each other and about 2 ½ – 4 cm (1 to 1½ inches) back from the nipple. Lift your breast slightly, and gently **press** the breast inwards toward your chest.
- Lightly **compress** your thumb and fingers together in a rolling motion towards the nipple.
- **Relax** your fingers for a couple of seconds then repeat the same motion. Do not squeeze the base of your nipple, as this will stop the flow of milk.
- Move around your breast so you are emptying the entire breast. Continue this until the flow of milk has completely stopped. You may want to switch hands now and again.

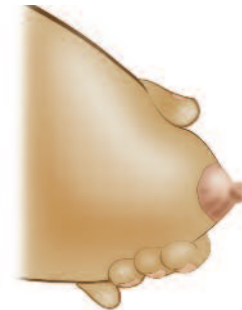
Moving back and forth from one breast to the other can help with the milk flow. It may help to massage the breast each time before you start.



**press**  
(back towards your chest)



**compress**



**relax**

*Expressing milk should be comfortable, not painful.*

## Expressing with a Pump

If you decide to use a pump, you can choose a manual or an electric pump. It is safest to purchase a manual or electric breast pump or purchase the kit that goes with rental electric breast pumps rather than borrowing a pump from someone else.

There are good manual pumps. These are inexpensive compared to electric breast pumps. Most manual pumps use either arm or hand action to create suction. If you have arm or hand problems, a manual pump might not be the best choice for you.

If you only need to pump for a few days or weeks you may decide to rent a hospital grade electric breast pump. Hospital grade electric breast pumps are also recommended if you are pumping for a baby with special needs such as a premature infant or a baby who is unable to breastfeed.

You will need to purchase a kit to use with the electric breast pump you are renting. It is generally best to purchase 2 kits so that you can double pump.

Single electric pumps take 10-15 minutes to remove milk from each breast. A double pump removes milk from both breasts in 10-15 minutes. Battery pumps are not a good idea for long-term use because they lose pressure as the battery wears out.

Electric breast pumps that can be purchased are not the same as hospital grade electric breast pumps that can be used by more than one mother. Purchasing an electric breast pump can be a good choice if you have an established milk supply and plan to be pumping for some time. Many mothers like to use an electric breast pump with a double kit when they return to work because they can express milk from both breasts at the same time.

Whether you decide on a manual or an electric pump:

- Check with other mothers to find out which pump worked well for them.
- Choose one that lets you adjust the pressure from low to high.
- Make sure it has a valve that prevents backflow.
- Make sure it does not hurt. If it hurts, get help.

When you are using a pump, make sure your whole nipple area is right inside the flange so that it won't hurt. Some breast pumps allow you to choose flanges in different sizes. Choose one that is right for you. Adjust the pump to its lowest setting, and increase the pressure as your milk starts to flow. Use as much pressure as is needed to keep your milk flowing. None of this should hurt. A skilled professional can help you choose a pump that is right for you.



## Reasons for Expressing Breast Milk

You may need to express and store breast milk to feed your baby for different reasons:

- If your baby is not able to breastfeed.
- If your breasts are too full.
- If you need to give your baby extra breast milk.
- If you are going to be away from your baby.

*“ It took me 6 weeks to get my baby boy to breastfeed. I had to pump and feed him breast milk while we both learned to breastfeed. It was nice to have the support. Something so natural, it’s not always easy, but you can learn, if you have the right resources, support and lots of patience. ”*

## Expressing Milk When Your Baby Is Not Able to Breastfeed

If your baby is sick or born prematurely, it may not be possible to breastfeed right away. Begin with early and frequent hand expression and pumping within 6 hours of birth and preferably within the first hour. Ask a qualified breastfeeding professional for help to get started.

You should hand express and pump 8 or more times in 24 hours, until your baby is breastfeeding efficiently directly from your breasts. Express your milk at least once during the night because this is when milk production is greatest. Expressing regularly, during the day and at least once at night, will ensure that you have a steady supply of milk.



### Reverse Pressure Softening

1. Place your fingers on each side of your nipple.
2. Push towards your ribs. Hold for about a minute.
3. Rotate your fingers around the nipple and repeat.
4. If part of your areola is still firm, repeat on that area.
5. Reverse pressure softening may be a bit uncomfortable but should not hurt.
6. Remember that you are pushing fluid away from the areola.

If breast fullness or engorgement continue to be a problem, be sure to talk to your health care provider.

## Expressing Milk When Your Breasts Are Too Full

Sometimes, when your breasts are too full, you may want to express some milk. Some babies find it difficult to latch when the breasts are full. If your baby will not latch, express enough to soften the area around your nipple. This will allow your baby to latch well and feed more efficiently. If your breasts are uncomfortable, express enough to make them comfortable. As your baby learns to feed well, your breasts will soften over time.

## Expressing Milk If Your Baby Needs Extra Breast Milk

Sometimes there is a reason your baby needs extra breast milk. She may be sleepy during feeds, not be gaining enough weight or born a little early. You can offer your baby your own expressed breast milk after she has breastfed. Expressing milk after each feed will also increase your supply to meet your baby's needs.



## Expressing Milk When You Have To Be Away From Your Baby

While you are away from your baby, be sure to express milk each time your baby would have fed. Expressing regularly will make you feel comfortable, keep up your milk supply, and prevent problems such as blocked ducts or mastitis. For more information see the fact sheets on mastitis and blocked ducts accompanying this resource at [http://en.beststart.org/for\\_parents/do-you-have-baby-0-12-months](http://en.beststart.org/for_parents/do-you-have-baby-0-12-months).

Some mothers like to store some breast milk as a backup supply. If you want to store some extra breast milk, you can express milk when your breasts are fullest, usually in the morning. Your milk supply will adjust and produce the extra milk for you to store.

If you have trouble getting your milk to flow, try pumping one breast while your baby breastfeeds on the other. Massaging the breast and combining hand expression with pumping can also be helpful. You will probably find that the amount you get depends on the time of day and whether you are tired or stressed. If you want to express more milk, take a break and then try again.

## Storing Breast Milk

Fresh breast milk is better for your baby than frozen breast milk. Thawed, frozen breast milk is better for your baby than infant formula.

How long you can safely store breast milk depends on where you store it, and whether your baby is healthy or sick.

Your baby may not be able to feed because she is sick or too small. Sick or premature babies in the hospital need to be protected from harmful bacteria. Parents must be especially careful how they store breast milk.

If you are expressing breast milk for a sick or premature baby in the hospital:

- Always put your milk in the refrigerator right after pumping.
- Do not store milk longer than 2 days in the refrigerator.
- Freeze breast milk that will not be used within 24-48 hours.

### Breast milk storage guidelines for healthy babies who are at home (Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine, 2010)

Chilled breast milk brought to room temperature	• 1-2 hour
Freshly expressed breast milk at room temperature (16-29°C)	• 3-4 hours
Fresh milk in refrigerator ( $\leq 4^{\circ}\text{C}$ )	• 72 hours
Thawed milk in refrigerator	• 24 hours from when it started to thaw
Cooler with a freezer pack	• 24 hours
Refrigerator freezer (separate door)	• 3-6 months
Deep freezer ( $\leq -17^{\circ}\text{C}$ )	• 6-12 months
<b>Throw out all milk that is older than the above storage times!</b>	



- Label your milk clearly with your name. Mark the date and time you expressed the milk on the container.
- Use clean glass or hard plastic containers that are BPA free or bags made for freezing breast milk. Do not use baby bottle liners because they often break.
- Use milk in the order of the date it was expressed. Throw out any milk that is older than the storage times on the previous page.
- Pour your freshly pumped breast milk into a new storage container each time you pump. Store breast milk in the amounts your baby needs for one feeding. If you don't express enough milk for a full feeding, you can add smaller amounts of milk together, as long as you cool all the milk before you combine it. Then use the milk according to the oldest date.
- Store breast milk near the back of the refrigerator where it is coldest. Don't store it in the fridge door where it is not as cold.
- When freezing milk, leave a 1.5 cm (1/2 inch) space at the top of the container. Breast milk will expand when it freezes. If you are using a bag, don't seal it until after the milk has frozen. If you have a self-defrosting freezer, place the milk on a shelf, because the bottom of the freezer warms up when it is defrosting.

## Thawed Milk

Thawed milk may taste or smell different than fresh breast milk. It can also look slightly blue, yellow or brown, depending on what the mother has eaten.

- Thaw frozen breast milk for 8-12 hours in the refrigerator, or under cool and then warm running water.
- When it is thawed gently shake it to mix in the fat.
- Throw away any breast milk which has been thawed longer than 24 hours.

## Cleaning

It is important to clean your breast pump and the containers used to store breast milk so that it is safe for your baby.

- After each use, clean the parts of the breast pump that have come in contact with your breast milk. Wash them with hot soapy water, rinse and air dry.
- Wash the containers you used to collect and store milk, using hot soapy water. Scrub them with a bottle brush, rinse and air dry.

## How To Feed Expressed Breast Milk To Your Baby

- Whenever possible, use fresh breast milk.
- Heat the container of breast milk by placing it in a bowl of warm water. Do not use a microwave or the stove. These methods can cause hot spots that can burn your baby's mouth, and also destroy some of the benefits of breast milk.
- Throw out any milk your baby does not finish at a feeding.
- You can cup or spoon feed your baby expressed breast milk.

If you would like more information or help, contact your local public health unit, your health care provider or a lactation consultant.

*“ When you compare the amount of time you breastfeed to your child’s whole life, it is worth investing the time and effort it takes to give them the best start possible. ”*