

Bayview Hospital (2014)

Expressing Your Breast Milk – A Guide for Mothers

Expressing is a way of taking breast milk from your breast without your baby needing to suck.

There may be times while you are breastfeeding that you will need to express your breast milk. This allows the baby to still have the benefits of breast milk even if he/she is not able to suck (prematurity) or if you cannot be with him/her all the time (return to work).

Other reasons for expressing are as follows:

- Your breast are uncomfortably full (engorgement)
- Your partner is going to help with feeding your baby.
- You want to boost your milk supply

You can express your milk by hand or by using a hand or electric pump. No one's way better than the other so just see whichever method you are most comfortable with. When you first start expressing some mothers find it can take awhile for the milk to start flowing, so try to find a time and place where you will be relaxed.

When expressing for a preterm baby or a baby who is unable to breastfeed it is best to start expressing within 1-3 hours after the birth of your baby and if your baby is unable to breastfeed then you should continue expressing regularly, every 3 hours or 8 times in 24hours. This will help your body to produce milk, even if your baby is not ready to feed yet.

Hand expressing

1. Have a clean sterilized container to hand before you start.
2. Wash your hands
3. You can stimulate the letdown reflex by: rolling your nipple between your finger and thumb and gently stroking your breast towards the nipple.
4. Position your finger and thumb about 2-3cms behind the tip of the nipple
5. Press the finger and thumb together towards your chest without sliding the fingers on the skin and gently compress.
6. Repeat the action in a rhythm similar to the baby's sucking, about once a second. At first only drops will appear but just keep going as it will help build up your supply. With practice and a little more time, milk will flow freely.
7. Rotate the position of the finger and thumb around the nipple, so that all the milk ducts are expressed.



Expressing using an Electric Pump

1. Wash your hands with soap and water
2. Assemble sterile expressing equipment
3. Ensure the correct size breast shield is used as one that is too small can damage the nipple and will not adequately drain the breast.
4. Pump each breast until the milk stops flowing. Gently stroking to assist letdown until the breast is soft and light.
5. You need to express your breast milk as often as you would expect your baby to feed, at least 8 times a day if your baby is not breastfeeding. To increase your milk supply you can express between breastfeeds.



Storage of Breast Milk

Breast Milk	Room Temperature	Refrigerator	Freezer
Freshly expressed into a sterilized container	6-8 hours @ 26° C or lower. Best stored in a refrigerator	24 hours at 4° C or lower. Store in the back of refrigerator where it is coolest	3 months in the freezer section of the refrigerator. 6-12 months in a deep freeze at – 18°C or lower

Thawing and Warming of Breast Milk

DO NOT leave frozen expressed milk to stand at room temperature to thaw, either:

- Thaw the milk in the fridge overnight or
- Hold the container under running cold water; gradually make the water warmer until the milk become liquid. **Do not** use boiling water; this can cause loss of vital nutrients and minerals in the breast milk.

Warm the container of chilled or thawed milk in a jug of hot water until it is body temperature.

Microwave ovens should NEVER be used to thaw milk or heat milk. Their safety is unknown and heating is uneven. Microwaves also reduce the anti-infection properties in breast milk.

References

Government of Western Australia, North Metropolitan Health Service: “Women and New Born Health Serve: Information Leaflet on Breast Feeding and Breast care:

<http://www.kemh.health.wa.gov.au/brochures/consumers/wnhs0560.pdf>

National Health Service UK: Patient Leaflet “Off to the Best Start”:

http://www.clch.nhs.uk/media/163989/start4life_off_to_the_best_start_leaflet.pdf

UNICEF the Breast Friendly Initiative: <http://www.breastmilk.co.uk/pdfs/Unicef%20-%20Guide%20to%20breastfeeding.pdf>