

Breastfeeding Support while you or your baby are hospitalised or unwell

The World Health Organisation recommends babies are exclusively breastfed for six months and then to continue to breastfeed to twelve months and beyond while family foods are being introduced. Although breastfeeding reduces your baby's risk of illness, you or your baby may still have an episode of being hospitalised or unwell while you are breastfeeding.

This can be a very stressful time for you and your family. It is important to make your family and any medical or hospital staff aware of your breastfeeding goals so effective support can be given. This leaflet may assist you during this time.

When your baby is unwell and/or hospitalised

- It is important to maintain your supply of breast milk when your baby:
 - is not feeding as well as baby normally does
 - is having shorter feeds due to illness
 - is receiving fluids intravenously.In each of these situations you will need to express your breasts when baby would normally be feeding.
- It may be easier to express with baby close beside you. Try a little more 'hands on' pumping if you are having trouble – massage breasts before pumping and try compressing/squeezing your breasts as you express
- If the hospitalisation is foreseen you may like to build up a reserve of breast milk in the weeks prior by expressing once a day and store in freezer.
- Ask the hospital if you can stay overnight so you can breastfeed baby. There may be a double electric pump for you to borrow and a fridge to store your milk.
- Ask the hospital staff as well as your support system of family and friends to help you and your baby.

If you have a booked hospitalisation

- Find out from your doctor and hospital you are attending how long you will be admitted for. Some hospitals may allow your exclusively breastfed baby to stay with you during this time as long as someone is there to look after the baby at all times if you are unable to.
- If you require a general anaesthetic, it is generally safe to breastfeed as soon as you are awake and safely able to respond to your baby. Mother Safe can be contacted if you or your doctor require further clarification.
- Build up a reserve of breastmilk in the freezer prior to this time. Expressing well can take practice. Try expressing once a day, usually after your morning feed when your breasts may feel the most full. If you don't collect much, try massaging your breasts first and then express both breasts 30-60 minutes after you finish feeding. This may work better for you. This milk can be dated and stored in BPA (Bisphenol A) free bags or glass containers in the freezer for future use. Expressing more than this may increase your supply, which could lead to full, uncomfortable breasts if or when you are separated from your baby.

If you have an unexpected hospitalisation and/or unwell

- If feeling unwell, make sure you are having adequate fluid / food intake and rest. Ask for help from family members and friends.
- In most cases even if you are contagious with a cold, flu or gastrointestinal upset it is safe for you to breastfeed. In fact, this can help reduce the likelihood of your baby becoming unwell due to the antibodies in your breastmilk.
- If you are admitted to hospital, make sure nursing staff and doctors are aware you are breastfeeding. Staff can notify lactation consultant / maternity unit of admission for support. There may be a double electric pump for you to borrow and a fridge to store your milk.
- Accommodation in facilities vary depending on the individual hospital /or ward. Mothers and breastfed

babies are kept together where possible. A support person needs to stay to care for baby if mother is in a single room.

- If you are too unwell to have baby in the room, it is important that you express to keep up your supply and prevent blocked ducts or mastitis. Express around the time your baby would normally be feeding. Your support person can bring in a pump, storage containers and sterilising equipment as needed.
- If your supply declines, you can build it back up once you are home and feeling better.

Medications or diagnostic testing while breastfeeding

- Let your doctor know that you are breastfeeding – it may be possible to use a different medication or reduce the fasting time
- If you or your baby are unable to breastfeed for a period of time, you may need to express for your own comfort and to maintain your milk supply
- If you are having a scan involving nuclear medicine, you may need to interrupt breastfeeding for a period of time. Ask your doctor or call Mother Safe for more information
- Occasionally mothers may be advised to cease breastfeeding due to the possible harmful effects of a medication to their babies. This would include mothers who need treatment with chemotherapy

agents (drugs for cancer), ergotamine derivatives (eg bromocriptine), gold salts, iodine, amiodarone, radiopharmaceuticals (nuclear medicine scans) (Ref: Mother Safe <http://www.mothersafe.org.au>)

- If you know that you will not be able to breastfeed for a period of time, you can express beforehand to store some breastmilk to give your baby. If treated with any of the medicines above, ask your medical adviser how long you will need to keep the breastmilk before it is safe to use.
- NOTE: It is safe to breastfeed if you are having an X-ray, MRI, CT, Angiogram, Ultrasound or Mammogram. (Ref: <https://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/bfinfo/radiology-and-breastfeeding>)
- You or your doctor can call Mother Safe for more information on medications and diagnostic tests (See below for contact numbers).

Contacts

- Your local Maternity Unit
- Your Child and Family Health Centre
- Australian Breastfeeding Association Helpline Ph: 1800 686 268, 7 days a week, or visit www.breastfeeding.asn.au
- Mother Safe (Medications in Pregnancy & Lactation Service) Ph: 02 9382 6539 or 1800 647 848 for callers outside the Sydney Metropolitan area. www.mothersafe.org.au/
- For a private Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) www.lcanz.org/find-a-consultant.htm
- After-hours telephone advice lines are listed in or on the back cover of your baby's *Personal Health Record* (Blue Book).

References

Eat for Health, NHMRC Feeding Guidelines Information for Health Workers, 2012
Australian Breastfeeding Association: A Caregiver's Guide to the Breastfed Baby April 2013
Mother Safe website www.mothersafe.org.au/
<https://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/bfinfo/radiology-and-breastfeeding>