

The loss of your baby is a very difficult time, often filled with grief, confusion and sadness. We are here to support you. It is also important to care for your breasts at this time. This information sheet offers information and practical suggestions on how to care for your breasts.

From about 16 weeks of pregnancy, colostrum (the early or 'first' milk) is produced. About three days after the birth of your baby your hormones will cause your breasts to fill with milk and this may cause a range of emotions. It is important to talk about your feelings with those close to you, or professional support is also available.

There are different things you can do to manage milk production. For example, you may want to suppress your milk, express your milk for a period of time, and/or create memories using your breast milk. Some women may wish to donate their breast milk to a milk bank for premature babies. It is important to do what feels right for you.

Suppression of your milk following the birth

Many women choose to suppress their milk using natural methods. If you limit the volume of milk removed, and use the suggestions below for your comfort, your breasts will stop making milk over a few days. There is also a medication that stops milk production if taken in the first 24 hours after birth. Your midwife, nurse, or doctor can discuss this with you.

Keeping your breasts comfortable as they fill with milk

- Apply cold relief to your breasts every few hours such as cold compresses or wrapped ice packs. Avoid heat on your breasts from hot showers and do not use heat packs on your breasts.
- Whenever your breasts feel too full, hand express a little milk. Express only enough to make you comfortable. This does not increase your supply as you are not emptying your breasts. It may be necessary to keep expressing for comfort for several days. Any lumps can be relieved by gently massaging the breast towards the nipple while hand expressing.
- Drink when you are thirsty. Cutting down fluids does not help reduce your milk supply.
- Take pain relief, such as paracetamol, as required according to the directions on the pack.
- For the first few days you may be uncomfortable lying in bed because your breasts are so full. Try lying on your back or on one side with an extra pillow supporting your breasts. Place a soft towel or cloth nappy under or across your breasts to soak up any leaking milk.
- If your breasts become engorged, painful and overfull and the ideas given above do not ease your discomfort, it may help to express all the milk in the breasts, just once, with an electric breast pump. This can relieve the pressure and from then on, you may be able to prevent it building up to that point again.
- If engorgement or lumps are not relieved or you become unwell, seek medical advice.

Suppressing your milk after you have chosen to initiate milk production

- Initially you will need to express regularly to keep your breasts comfortable and to avoid blocked ducts or mastitis.
- Gradually decrease how often and how much you express while keeping your breasts comfortable.
- Your milk production will slowly decrease but may take some weeks to stop. During this time, maintain breast comfort using the measures already described.

- Your nurse, midwife, doctor, or lactation consultant can provide further advice.
- Seek medical advice if you are feeling unwell or notice any tender or red lumps that you are unable to massage out.

On the day of the funeral

This will be a long and emotional day. You may find the following helpful:

- Wear a comfortable bra and breast pads if your breasts are leaking.
- Take extra breast pads in case of leakage.
- Express for comfort before the funeral.
- If your milk starts to leak out strongly and your milk lets down, you can stop the overflow by pressing firmly on your nipple with your hand or forearm for several seconds.
- Take pain relief as required, according to the directions on the pack.
- Dark coloured or patterned tops are less likely to show wet patches.
- A cardigan or jacket may also help.

Other things you may wish to do

Sustained expressing

Some women may appreciate the time expressing gives them to connect with and grieve for their baby. You may want to express your milk for days, weeks or even months.

Donate your breast milk

Some women find donating their breast milk assists with their grieving. You may be able to donate your milk to a milk bank to be used for premature babies. There is currently one breast milk bank in Sydney. Discuss this with the milk bank (see contact details below) or your midwife, nurse, or doctor if this interests you to see if you are eligible to donate your milk and to find out more about the process.

Making memories using breast milk

Some women undertake memory-making activities that involve their breast milk. For example, burying some milk with your baby, pouring it on a special plant in the garden, using it to make breast milk jewellery, or using breast milk as a symbol in the funeral service.

Resources

- Your Midwife, Nurse, Doctor, Lactation Consultant or Child and Family Health Centre.
- Australian Breastfeeding Association: breastfeeding.asn.au. 24-hour helpline: 1800 686 268.
- Australian Red Cross Milk Bank: milkbank.com.au/contact-us
- Bears of Hope: bearsofhope.org.au
- National Association for Loss and Grief (NALAG). <https://www.nalag.org.au>
- Private lactation consultants: lcanz.org/find-a-lactation-consultant
- Red Nose Grief and Loss: rednosegriefandloss.org.au. 24-hour helpline: 1300 308 307.
- Sands. Miscarriage, Stillbirth, and Neonatal Death Support: sands.org.au
- Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Alliance: sanda.psanx.com.au/parent-centre/support-organisations
- If you need an interpreter, please call Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on 131450

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