

Expressing is a way to provide breast milk for your baby if you are unable to breastfeed your baby directly. The amount of milk you need to express will depend on the reason you are expressing.

## Some reasons you may need to express include

- Your baby is premature, sick, or unable to suck well.
- When milk supply increases, to soften a firm areola before latching baby.
- Your nipples are too sore to feed from and need time to rest and heal.
- You wish to increase your milk supply.
- Due to sudden weaning, separation, or engorgement.
- You are returning to work or going somewhere without your baby.

## General information

- Many women will find it easier to collect colostrum (the first milk) by hand expressing. At first you will get a small amount of milk - about a teaspoonful. This is normal as your newborn baby's stomach only holds a small amount of milk. As the milk volume increases most women will find using a breast pump enables them to obtain more milk.
- If you are expressing for a newborn baby who is unable to feed at the breast, you should aim to express at least eight to ten times in 24 hours, including at least once overnight. The number of times you express over a 24-hour period is more important than the length of time spent expressing. Aim to express for about 20-30 minutes (total) each time, or until milk no longer flows but just drips.
- As milk is removed from your breasts, more milk will be made. Your milk supply will depend on how often you express along with how well your breasts are drained.
- If you need to increase your milk supply start by massaging both breasts, use a double electric pump (hospital grade pumps can be hired from the Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) and other sources), and then finish off by hand expressing both breasts. This will enable you to drain your breasts well.
- Spending time holding or doing 'kangaroo care' with your preterm or unwell baby will help you bond with your baby and help with your milk supply. If you are separated from your baby keep a photo, video or piece of your baby's clothing with you.
- If you are expressing to relieve breast engorgement, hand expressing is usually recommended and just express enough to feel comfortable.
- If you are expressing for a short separation you may want to express once a day for a few days in a row (you may not obtain the volume your baby normally takes in one session as direct breastfeeding is usually more efficient than expressing).
- If you are expressing due to returning to work, build up a supply of milk by expressing once a day in the weeks leading up to your return. When at work the best time to express is around the time your baby normally feeds.
- Talk to your midwife, nurse, or lactation consultant for more information about expressing for your baby.

## Preparation

- Wash your hands with soap and warm water. Dry on a clean towel.
- Find a warm quiet area when expressing.

- Looking at your baby or a photo of your baby may help increase the flow of milk.
- Try to relax, this is important for your 'let down' reflex. Try taking deep breaths or play music.
- Gently massage both breasts towards the nipple to assist your 'let-down'.

### **Hand expressing**

- Use a clean, wide-mouthed container to collect your milk.
- Place thumb and forefinger opposite each other, 2-3 cm behind nipple, and press back towards your chest, then gently squeeze your finger and thumb towards each other. Repeat pressing back and squeezing. It may take a minute or two for the milk to flow.
- When the milk flow slows, move your hand around the nipple and areola to express all ducts.
- When milk flow stops in one breast, change, and express the other breast. You can switch between breasts several times during one expressing session. It may take 20-30 minutes to express from both breasts.
- Ask for help if you have problems expressing your breasts. It may help to watch videos on expressing your milk – ask your Midwife or Nurse for suggestions.

### **Expressing with a hand or electric breast pump**

- Follow the manufacturer's instructions on how to operate and clean your pump.
- Some electric breast pumps have cycles: a fast rate to assist with the letdown and a slower rate while your milk is flowing.
- Most pumps come with a medium flange size, but you can buy different sizes from the manufacturer. Your nipple should move in and out of the funnel of the flange and should not rub against the sides of the funnel while you are pumping. Note that your nipples may expand during pumping, this is normal, you may need to increase your flange size after a few days to accommodate this.
- Prepare as above, it may help to soften the areola and start the milk flow by hand.
- Centre the nipple in the funnel portion of the pump with good skin contact around your areola.
- Start with gentle suction and increase the strength of your pump slowly.
- Pumping should not cause pain.
- Switch from breast to breast as the flow slows, for 20-30 minutes in total. Gentle massage and compressing of the breast can increase the amount of milk expressed.

### **Storing and transporting your breastmilk**

- Breast milk is best used when fresh, it can also be refrigerated or stored frozen in a clean, covered plastic or glass container. Label with your name, date and time expressed.
- Do not add freshly expressed milk to frozen milk.
- To transport milk, place it in an insulated container with ice bricks.
- Freezing milk in small quantities reduces waste.

### **Feeding your baby your expressed milk**

- Freshly expressed milk does not need warming.
- You can give baby milk cold from the fridge or warm refrigerated or thaw frozen milk by standing it in warm (not boiling) water for a few minutes. Milk should NOT be thawed or warmed in a microwave. It heats unevenly and the microwave may change or destroy some of the milk's special properties.

- Test the temperature by shaking a few drops onto the inside of your wrist – it should feel no warmer than your wrist.
- Shake the milk gently to mix before feeding baby.

Breastmilk	Room temperature	Fridge	Freezer
Freshly expressed into closed container.	26°C or lower. 6-8 hours. If refrigeration is available store in the fridge.	4°C or lower. No more than 72 hours Store at the back of the fridge, where it is coldest.	2 weeks in the freezer compartment inside a fridge (-15°C). 3 months in a freezer section of a fridge with a separate door (-18°C). 6-12 months in deep freeze (-20°C or lower).
Previously frozen, thawed in the fridge but not warmed.	4 hours or less	24 hours	Do not refreeze
Thawed outside the fridge in warm water.	Until end of feed, throw out left over milk	4 hours	Do not refreeze
Infant has begun feeding	Until end of feed, throw out left over milk	Discard	Discard

### Cleaning and sterilising equipment

- Follow the manufacturer's instructions on cleaning and sterilising breast pump equipment.
- Babies are prone to infection, so it is essential to sterilise bottles, teats, caps, and dummies until baby is 12 months old.

### Cleaning breast pump equipment, bottles, teats, caps, and dummies

- Discard left over milk.
- Rinse equipment in cold water.
- Wash in hot, soapy water using a clean bottle brush.
- Rinse well with warm water.
- Sterilise before storing in a clean sealed container.

### Sterilisation using the boiling method

- Place washed equipment in a large saucepan.
- Cover with water, ensuring all equipment is submerged with no air bubbles.
- Bring the water to the boil and boil for five minutes.
- Allow the equipment to cool (to avoid burns) in the saucepan then remove with clean tongs or clean hands. Shake off excess water.
- Store sterilised equipment in a clean, sealed container in the fridge for up to 24 hours (re-sterilise any unused equipment after 24 hours).

### Sterilising using a microwave or electric steam sterilising unit

- Ensure your steriliser is out of the reach of children.

- Follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Use caution when unloading the steriliser, steam and water can cause burns.

### Using a chemical disinfection method

- You can disinfect your equipment in an antibacterial chemical solution that comes as tablets or a concentrated liquid.
- Store the chemicals and the solution well out of reach of children.
- Use plastic or glass containers and equipment as the chemical will cause metal to corrode.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions.

#### **Resources**

Your Midwife, Child and Family Health Nurse, or Lactation Consultant  
Australian Breastfeeding Association [www.breastfeeding.asn.au](http://www.breastfeeding.asn.au) Helpline: 1800 686 268.  
Raising Children Network [www.Raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.Raisingchildren.net.au)  
Global Health Media Videos: [www.globalhealthmedia.org](http://www.globalhealthmedia.org)  
Australian Infant Feeding Guidelines (2012) [www.eatforhealth.gov.au](http://www.eatforhealth.gov.au)  
If you need an interpreter, please call Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on 131 450.

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