

Expressing and Storing Breastmilk



Expressing breastmilk is the act of removing milk from your breast, either by hand or using a manual or electric pump. You may want to express milk if:

- your breasts feel uncomfortably full: expressing relieves the fullness and makes it easier for your baby to attach onto the breast
- you will be spending some time away from your baby and would like someone else to give him your breastmilk, or are returning to work
- your baby is not feeding well (for example if your baby was born with a cleft lip or palate)
- your baby was born early and you need to stimulate your milk supply for when he is ready to suckle from the breast (about 32 weeks if your baby is healthy)

It helps to know how to express your milk, to empower you should you need to, either for comfort or to store to give to your baby later, to ensure he continues to receive the nutritional and health benefits of your breastmilk.

Some mothers express a little colostrum (first milk, rich in carbohydrates, protein and antibodies) into syringes to freeze during the last trimester of pregnancy, in case either they or their baby face feeding difficulties at birth. These mothers would be in good health, and their pregnancies would be progressing well.

Hand Expressing

Hand expression is useful throughout the breastfeeding relationship.

First, wash your hands. Bend over and allow your breasts to rest naturally. Gently stroke, shake and massage them as if doing a breast examination. Sitting, place your hand (either hand) with your fingers and thumb making a 'C' shape about 3 cm back from the nipple, often on the edge of the brown part (the areola). Gently bring the thumb and first two fingers together, push in towards the chest wall, then roll towards the nipple. It is usually more comfortable to roll rather than slide the thumb and fingers. This compresses the milk ducts and after a short time you should be rewarded with a few drops of milk, then perhaps a squirt, which you can catch in a sterile container. You can move your hand around the edge of the areola as the milk flow slows, expressing rhythmically as you go. Swap breasts at least twice and express for about 20-30 minutes in total. If your baby is unable to come to your breast it is important to begin expressing as soon as you are able, and to express as often as your baby would feed, about 8-12 times in 24 hours in the early days.



If you are expressing shortly after birth the first milk, colostrum, ranges in colour from dark orange to pale lemon and can be stored at temperatures of up to 32°C for 12 hours for a full term baby. You can expect to express very small quantities, e.g. a teaspoon or so each time, for the first couple of days. Your baby may take milk more easily from someone other than you, in perhaps a dropper, syringe, spoon or small cup.

Pumping Is An Acquired Art

Expression of breastmilk is a learned skill, so do not be disheartened if you do not seem to be expressing off much milk at first.

On about day 3-5 after your baby is born, your breasts will start to produce 'mature milk', although colostrum is present in dwindling amounts in mature milk for about two weeks. The volume of milk you produce will increase. When 'mature' milk comes in, many mothers prefer to express using a manual or electric pump, as it is usually quicker, although hand expressing is often fine for occasional expression. Be sure the pump you choose has a flange big enough to accommodate your nipple comfortably - some pumps have more than one flange size so look out for this if you don't have small nipples.

Pumps work by generating and releasing suction to remove milk from the breast. Some electric pumps allow you to regulate the suction level for your personal comfort, and some allow the user to move around while pumping. You may find it useful to have a pump that can be used easily with one hand, particularly if you intend to pump one breast while your baby feeds on the other. Hand operated pumps can be either cylinder pumps or have a handle to squeeze. All pump parts need to be kept clean, and some working mothers have spare collecting parts they can take home to wash.

You may find it easier to pump if you prepare a little beforehand. Stress and cool body temperature can make pumping less productive by inhibiting the milk ejection reflex so you could try using a warm compress, breast massage and relaxation techniques. It may also help to have a photograph of your baby to look at, or a piece of his recently worn clothing to remind you of his scent.

Storing Expressed Breastmilk

Refrigerated or frozen milk may be stored in hard-sided plastic or glass containers with well-fitting tops, or breastmilk storage bags specifically designed for human milk. Disposable bottle liners are not recommended. The guidelines below are for the storage of 'mature' breastmilk:

Temperature	Storage Time
Room temperature (19-26°C)	Up to 6 hours
Refrigerator (<4°C)	Up to 72 hours
Single door refrigerator with freezer section	Up to 2 weeks in the freezer section
Two door refrigerator / freezer	3-4 months in the freezer section
Deep freeze at a constant 0°F (-18°C)	6 months

If you have any concern about stored milk, discard it and do not feed it to your baby. If you have any questions about proper storage of breastmilk, talk to your healthcare provider, lactation consultant or breastfeeding counsellor.

Mothers who pump and store their breastmilk at work in a shared refrigerator label it with their name or put it in a bag so it is not mistaken for cows milk. Cooled milk can be transported in a cool bag with deep frozen ice packs. It is a good idea to protect the milk from the ice packs to prevent it from freezing.



How To Warm Breastmilk

- Ideally, thaw in the fridge.
- If milk has been thawed in the fridge, it can be refrigerated unopened for up to 24 hours for later use.
- If heating is desired, heat in a bowl of hot water, or under warm, running water.
- Do not bring the temperature of the milk to boiling point, although milk can be scalded before freezing if you find your milk smells rancid after freezing. (Milk high in Lipase can smell rancid after freezing. Scalding prevents this).
- Gently swirl the milk before testing the temperature. Swirling will also redistribute the cream into the milk. (It is normal for stored milk to separate into a cream and milk layer.) Try not to shake vigorously as this could damage some of the live components of human milk.
- Do not heat in a microwave as beneficial properties can be destroyed. Heating in this way can also create 'hot spots' in the milk so is not recommended.
- Thawed milk should not be refrozen.

Useful Organisations:

La Leche League International

www.llli.org

National Childbirth Trust

www.nct.org.uk

This information is available to download as a pdf from:

www.lansinoh.co.uk