

# Expressing and storing breastmilk



Health  
South Eastern Sydney  
Local Health District

**Expressing is a great way to provide breastmilk to your baby if you are unable to feed directly for any reason.**

## This could be because:

- Your baby is premature, sick or unable to suck well
- You wish to increase your supply
- Your nipples are too sore to feed from and need time to rest and heal
- For comfort due to sudden weaning, separation or engorgement
- You are returning to work, have an appointment or a special occasion.

## CHOICES FOR EXPRESSING

- Hand expression
- Breast pump (hand or electric)

Express eight times in 24 hours, including at least once overnight, if your baby is unable to feed at the breast.

If you are returning to work, the best time to express is around the time your baby normally feeds.

## Preparation

- Wash your hands with soap and warm water. Dry using a clean towel before handling your breasts.
- Gently massage the whole breast towards the nipple to assist your 'let-down'.
- Your 'let-down' may be slower when expressing. Slow, deep breathing and looking at your baby or a photo of your baby may increase the flow of milk.
- It often takes time to be comfortable with expressing. Please ask for help if you find it difficult to express any milk.

## To hand express

- 1 Use a clean, wide-mouthed container to collect the milk.
- 2 Place thumb and forefinger opposite each other, 2-3 cm behind nipple, and press into your chest.
- 3 Hold this position then gently squeeze your finger and thumb towards each other, being careful not to cause pain.
- 4 Repeat several times as it can take a minute or two for the milk to flow.
- 5 When flow slows, move around the nipple and areola to express all parts of the breast.
- 6 When milk flow stops in one breast, change and express the other breast.
- 7 It may take 20-30 minutes to express from both breasts.
- 8 Ask for help if you have problems expressing your breasts.

During the first couple days after your baby's birth it is normal to only get a small amount of milk. You usually produce more milk than you get by expressing.

## Using a hand pump or electric breast pump

- 1 Hand expressing is recommended prior to the milk 'coming in' and flowing.
- 2 Follow the manufacturer's instructions on how to operate and clean it.
- 3 Prepare as for hand expressing, soften the areola and start milk flow by hand expression.

- 4 Centre the nipple in the funnel portion of the pump with good skin contact all around.
- 5 Start with gentle suction and increase the strength slowly.
- 6 Switch from breast to breast as the flow slows, for 20-30 minutes in total. Gently massaging and compressing the breast can increase the amount of milk expressed.
- 7 A double pump kit can help increase your milk supply, and also save you time.
- 8 Hand expressing for a few more minutes after using the pump can further drain the breasts and increase your supply.

## STORING YOUR BREASTMILK

- Milk is best used when fresh, but can be refrigerated or stored frozen in a clean, covered plastic or glass container. Label it with your name, date and time expressed.
- Do not add freshly expressed milk to refrigerated or frozen milk.

## Before feeding your baby

Warm the bottle of milk in hot (not boiling) water for a few minutes. Shake gently to mix.

- Milk should NOT be thawed or warmed in a microwave. It heats unevenly and may change or destroy some of the milk's special properties.
- Thawed milk must be used within 24 hours if stored in a fridge, within four hours at room temperature.

BREASTMILK	ROOM TEMP	FRIDGE	FREEZER
Freshly expressed into closed container	6-8 hours (26°C or lower) If refrigeration is available store there	No more than 72 hours (5°C or lower) Store at back, where it is coldest	2 weeks in freezer compartment inside a fridge (-15°C) 3 months in freezer section of fridge with separate door (-18°C) 6-12 months in deep freeze (-20°C) or lower
Previously frozen, thawed in fridge but not warmed	4 hours or less	24 hours	Do not refreeze
Thawed outside 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

- To transport milk, place it in an insulated container with ice bricks.
- Freezing milk in small quantities reduces waste.

## STERILISATION OF EQUIPMENT

Babies are prone to infection so it is essential to keep bottles, teats, caps and dummies sterilised for the first 12 months.

To clean bottles, teats and dummies

- 1 Discard left over milk.
- 2 Rinse equipment in cold water.
- 3 Wash in hot, soapy water using a clean bottle brush.
- 4 Rinse under cold, running water.
- 5 Sterilise equipment.

### Sterilisation - boiling method

- 1 Place washed equipment in a large saucepan.
- 2 Cover with water, removing air bubbles.
- 3 Boil for five minutes, once bubbles start rising.
- 4 Allow equipment to cool in saucepan or use clean tongs to avoid scalds.
- 5 Store sterilised equipment in a clean, sealed container in the fridge.
- 6 Wash and boil equipment every 24 hours whether used or not.

### Chemical disinfection method

Follow the manufacturer's instructions when using antibacterial solution or tablets to make solution correctly. Use plastic or glass as metal corrodes.

- 1 After washing, submerge all items. Remove all air bubbles and cover the container.

- 2 Soak as per manufacturer's instructions.

- 3 A good shake will rid items of any excess solution. Do not rinse.
- 4 Store equipment in a clean, covered container in fridge.
- 5 Wash container in hot, soapy water. Make up fresh solution and disinfect equipment every 24 hours.
- 6 Store the chemical well out of reach of children.

### Microwave or electric steam sterilising units

These are suitable to use as long as the manufacturer's instructions are followed. The amount of water and length of time taken will vary with each unit.

## 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](http://www.breastfeeding.asn.au)
- For a Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) [www.lcanz.org/find-a-consultant.htm](http://www.lcanz.org/find-a-consultant.htm)
- MotherSafe (Medications in Pregnancy & Lactation Service)  
Ph: (02) 9382 6539 or 1800 647 848 if outside the Sydney Metropolitan area. Monday - Friday, 9am - 5pm.
- After-hours telephone advice lines are listed in your baby's *Personal Health Record* (Blue Book).

## References

Eat for Health, NHMRC Feeding Guidelines Information for Health Workers 2012.  
Riordan J, 2004. Breastfeeding and Human Lactation 3rd Ed. Jones and Bartlett, Mass.