

Storage and Handling of Breast Milk



If there is any reason to postpone breastfeeding, give the baby extra milk apart from breastfeeding, stop breastfeeding temporarily, or if you and your baby are separated, then you can pump breast milk to maintain your milk supply. Expressing milk also allows you to continue to give your milk to your baby. (See handout “Expressing Breast Milk.”) When pumping breast milk, you will need to consider how to store and handle the milk in the cleanest and safest way. Below some guidelines.

How and How Long Can I Store Expressed Breast Milk?

You can store expressed breast milk (ebm) at room temperature, in the fridge and in the freezer.

Storing ebm at room temperature

Freshly pumped breast milk can be kept at a room temperature of below 25°C for four hours (for healthy term babies) or one hour (for premature babies). Freshly pumped milk that is kept at room temperature does not need to be warmed up prior to feeding it to your baby.

Storing ebm in the fridge

Ebm can be stored in the fridge for 4-8 days (for healthy term babies) or 48 hours (for premature babies). If you think that you may not use it within this time period or the milk in the fridge has almost reached its expiration date, freeze it.

Storing ebm in the freezer

Frozen ebm can be kept for up to three months (at -18°C) and for up to twelve months in a deep freeze (at -20°C).

Make sure you place the milk in a part of the fridge or freezer that is not subject to changes in temperature as the door is opened and closed. If you use plastic nurser bags, use two layers or protect them from being bumped and torn in the freezer. Write the date of when the milk was expressed on the container or nurser bag.





Layering Frozen Breast Milk

You may add “newly expressed” milk to previously chilled or frozen milk. Chill the freshly pumped milk in the fridge prior to adding it to refrigerated or frozen milk. The expiration date of that container of milk will be from the date of the original milk.

Divide Into Feeding Size Quantities

It is best to freeze your milk in feeding sized quantities. Initially, you might not yet know how much your baby needs per feed. Freeze in portions of 60-90 mls to start. To avoid having to discard unused thawed ebm, don't thaw more milk than your baby will take in 24 hours. You can always get more if necessary.

Thawing and Warming Expressed Breast Milk

By putting the container of milk in a bowl of lukewarm water you can warm up refrigerated ebm prior to feeding it to your baby. Of course, you can also use a bottle warmer. Don't use a microwave to warm breast milk. Don't make it warmer than body temperature (37°C). Put some warm milk on the inside of your wrist to test if the milk is at the right temperature.

To thaw frozen ebm, you can put the container of frozen milk in a bowl of lukewarm water. Thawed ebm can be warmed up prior to giving it to your baby or you can put it in the fridge for later use. Thawed ebm must be discarded after 24 hours. Do not re-freeze it.

Ebm that is taken out of the fridge and warmed up, needs to be consumed within one hour. Discard any milk left in a bottle after a feeding.

Transporting Expressed Breast Milk

Chill any milk that you pump at work either in a refrigerator or a portable cooler bag. Use the cooler bag to transport the milk home.

Summary

Temperature	Use before (healthy, term baby)	(premature baby)
Room temperature (<25°C)	4 hrs	1 hr
Refrigerated	4-8 days	48 hrs
Frozen (<-18°C)	3 months	3 months
Frozen (<-20°C)	12 months	12 months
Warmed ebm	1 hr	1 hr
Ebm, once out of fridge	1 hr	1 hr
Thawed ebm (kept in fridge)	24 hrs	24 hrs

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