

Choosing a Breast Pump



There is a great variety of breast pumps on the market. It can be quite overwhelming, making it hard to choose the right pump for you. What are things I should pay attention to when selecting a pump? Is buying a second-hand pump suitable? When should I buy a pump: during pregnancy or is it better to wait until after the birth of the baby? I hope that the information in this handout will help you make the right choice for you.



Breast Pumps can be divided into four categories:

- Hospital grade pumps: If after the birth you need to be separated from your baby for any reason or latching to the breast isn't possible yet, then it is best to use a hospital grade pump. It is the only type that is designed to start your milk supply when you are not breastfeeding yet. If a hospital grade pump is not available, then a bilateral personal use pump would be your second choice.
- Personal use pumps: Personal use pumps are electric pumps that are often used by employed mothers that are away from their baby for eight hours or more. If you need to pump several times a day, a personal use pump would be a good choice.

If you only need to use a pump occasionally, then you can choose a battery, small electric or a hand pump.

- Battery or small electric pumps: Often used by employed mothers or for occasional use.
- Hand pumps: For occasional use.

If you have inverted or flat nipples you can use any pump just before breastfeeding to try to pull the nipple out. Or if you are engorged, express some milk by hand or pump prior to feeding.



What to pay attention to when selecting a breast pump

1. Choose a pump with adjustable breast flange.

Many pumps come with a standard size flange that fits most women. However, if you have very small or very large nipples, you probably need a smaller or larger flange. A good fitting flange completely supports the areola. When the flange is too big, part of the areola will be pulled into the flange. When the flange is too tight, the nipple is tight in the nipple tunnel, pumping hurts or does not empty the breast completely.

2. Choose a pump with adjustable suction and cycle frequency.

If you have a pump with adjustable suction and cycle frequency, then you can adjust it to the most effective and most comfortable level for you. Start pumping on low suction and fast cycles. When your milk begins to flow (after about two minutes), you can turn your pump cycling down and gradually increase the suction. Don't turn the suction beyond when it begins to feel uncomfortable.

3. Should I choose a single or bilateral breast pump?

Breast pumps can remove milk from one breast at a time or both breasts simultaneously. Bilateral pumping cuts the time that you need to pump in half and it stimulates the hormones of lactation better.

4. Choose a pump with different power sources.

It is useful that your electric pump can both be plugged in, as well as operate on batteries. If there is a power outage or you're in a place where there is no socket, you can still use your pump.

5. Check the safety of your pump.

If it is operated by electricity, the pump should be rated as safe. Make sure that it will automatically cut off at suction levels above 240 mmHg. Higher levels could damage breast tissue.

Buying a second-hand breast pump

It is not suitable to use second-hand battery, small electric and hand pumps. A good quality bilateral personal use pump can be quite expensive to buy. Hospital grades pumps are even more expensive. Hospital grade pumps are usually rental pumps. You only have to buy a new kit, which contains those parts of the pump that do get into contact with milk. What about a personal use pump: is it suitable to buy one second-hand? When buying a second-hand personal use pump, there are some things that need to be taken into consideration:

1. Choose a pump with a closed system.

- A personal use pump can have an open or a closed system. When using a pump with an open motor, milk can get into the pump, possibly leaving behind bacteria. These pumps can be used by one mother only. Hospital grade pumps and personal use pumps with a closed system can be used by more than one person, because milk won't be able to get into the pump.
- Buy a new kit. The parts of a personal use pump with a closed system that do get into contact with milk, should be cleaned after each pumping session. (See handout "Cleaning Your Breast Pump.") When buying a second-hand pump, replace these parts by buying a new kit for that particular pump.

Below a list of pumps with an open and a closed system:

Pumps with open system

Breastflow electric pump
Difrax BtoB pump
Medela Mini Electric
Medela Mini Electric Plus
Medela Pump in Style Advanced
Medela Swing & Medela Freestyle

Pumps with closed system

Ameda Lactaline Personal
Ardo Calypso
Ardo Calypso To Go
Ardo Calypso Double Plus
Philips Avent Isis IQ Duo

2. How long and often has the pump been used?

The more and the longer a pump has been used, the greater the chance that the motor breaks down. Replacing a motor is almost as expensive as buying a new pump.

3. Is there still a warranty?

4. Is the pump complete?

Make sure the breast pump is complete with a manual, tubes, connector with valves and bottles.



When best to buy a pump

Enquire during pregnancy where you can rent or borrow a hospital grade pump: ask your hospital, a local lactation consultant, a baby shop, or look on-line.

When in China, be aware that some hospitals offer women to use their hospital grade pump during their hospital stay, but limit its use: for example once a day for a few minutes. If you depend on a breast pump to establish a milk supply, this will not be sufficient as you need to start pumping as soon after birth as possible and then at least 8 times a day for about 15-20 minutes.

(See handout “Expressing Breast Milk.”)

Most Dutch hospitals have hospital grade pumps available for use by moms who stay at the hospital. At discharge you can rent a pump from the hospital, a lactation consultant, or “kraamzorg”.

You don’t know in advance if you will need a pump and what kind of pump is most suitable for you. If you know that you can rent or borrow a hospital grade pump if needed, wait until after the birth of your baby to purchase a breast pump that meets your needs. If there is no hospital grade pump available to rent or borrow, consider buying the best pump that you can afford during pregnancy.

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