

Expressing Breast Milk



Breastfeeding is the best way to feed your baby. Your milk is better for your baby than any formula that you can buy. ([Read handout “Choosing: Breastfeeding or Bottle-feeding?”](#)) However, there may be reasons that breastfeeding needs to be postponed, for example when your baby is ill or premature or when you are too ill to feed your baby. Or there might be a medical reason to give the baby extra milk apart from breastfeeding. If your nipples are too sore and painful to breastfeed, you might need to stop breastfeeding for a few days to allow your nipples to heal. Even in these situations it is best to give the baby your milk. You can do this by expressing breast milk. The more you stimulate your breasts (by feeding the baby or by expressing milk), the more milk your breasts will make. ([Read handout “Milk Production – How it Works.”](#)) Therefore, expressing milk won’t only allow you to give your milk to your baby, but it will also help to establish and maintain a good milk supply. Expressing breast milk is a skill that you need to learn. In this handout you can read information on how to help you to be effective when expressing milk.

Selecting a Breast Pump

You can express breast milk by hand or with a breast pump. In the first days after birth hand expression can be more effective at removing colostrum than using a breast pump. If you need to express milk regularly, then you might want to use a breast pump. There are many breast pumps to choose from. It is important to choose the right pump in the right situation. [Read handout “Selecting a Breast Pump”](#) to help you to choose the right pump for you.

When to Start

If for whatever reason you cannot start breastfeeding after the baby is born, it is important to start expressing milk as soon as possible, preferably within an hour of birth, at least within six hours of birth.

If for any reason you need to supplement (= giving the baby extra milk apart from breastfeeding), start expressing milk. This will not only allow you to supplement with your own milk, it will also stimulate your breasts to produce more milk.

In the first few days after the birth of your baby, you will probably only express a few drops of milk during each pumping session. This is normal. The goal is to stimulate the breasts to start producing more milk. The first milk you produce is called colostrum, it has a yellowish color and is thick. It contains a lot of antibodies, which protect your baby against infections. So, don’t throw these drops of valuable colostrum away, but feed it to your baby.

Frequency

How often and how long you need to express milk depends on the reason for expressing milk. If you need to establish and maintain a good milk supply by using a breast pump, start pumping as soon after birth as possible and then pump both breasts eight or more times per day, using a hospital grade pump. The pump takes the place of your baby if he were able to breastfeed. He would be feeding eight or more times each day. It isn’t necessary to keep to a set schedule, pump whenever you can. If you miss a session, pump more often later in the day. If you can, pump even more: 10-12 times especially during the first 1-2 weeks.

Some mothers choose to pump once during the night. Others prefer to sleep through the night. You have to decide what works best for you. If you decide not to pump at night, make sure that there is no more than six hours between your last pumping session in the evening and your next pumping session in the morning.



If your baby drinks several times a day from the breast and at other times is fed in another way, then pump those times your baby doesn't drink directly from the breast.

If your baby isn't effective enough at the breast or doesn't drink long enough at the breast or you need to supplement for whatever reason, it is important that you express milk after each breastfeeding session in order to maintain a good milk supply.

Duration

During the first few days, express both breasts for about 15-20 minutes each time. Once the milk comes in, it is important to watch the milk flow. It may take a few minutes for the milk to start flowing. That is normal. When the milk stops flowing and sprays of milk become drops of milk, continue pumping for another 2-3 minutes. You can also do some hand massage to remove the remaining milk. Rotate your hands around the breast to empty all areas.

Stimulating your Let-Down Reflex

Every time you stimulate the breasts (through nursing or pumping), a signal goes to your brain, causing the release of the hormones prolactin and oxytocin. Oxytocin causes the milk to flow. This is what we call the "let-down reflex". When expressing milk, it might be harder to trigger a let-down reflex. Tension, stress, anger, pain, fatigue and lack of confidence can inhibit the flow of milk. Usually this is only a temporary problem. Below are some suggestions to stimulate the let-down reflex:

- Make sure you're in a pleasant surrounding with a comfortable temperature.
- Start with a ritual before pumping: do some relaxing exercises, relax shoulders, get a back massage, have a warm drink, massage your breasts, gently rub your nipples with the palm of your hand, roll your nipple gently between thumb and index finger. Massaging your breasts, stimulating the nipples and using warm flannels on your breasts will help to get the milk flowing.
- If possible, try to pump in close proximity to the baby. If this is not possible, look at a picture of your baby, smell baby smells, think of your baby, think of holding him or her.
- Express one breast while the baby drinks from the other breast.
- Oxytocin nose spray: Talk to your doctor if you have a hard time relaxing and stimulating a let-down reflex. Your doctor might prescribe this synthetic hormone, which you spray into your nose five minutes before pumping or breastfeeding.
- Caffeine, smoking and alcohol inhibit the let-down reflex.

Make Sure Your Flange Fits

You can tell the flange fits you if it completely supports the areola and does not pull any areola into the tunnel of the flange indicating it would be too large. You can tell if the flange is too tight if the nipple is tight in the nipple tunnel, hurts or does not empty the breast completely.

Pumping Routine

- Many mothers become thirsty whilst pumping, so have a drink ready in arm's reach.
- Wash and dry your hands.
- Assemble your pump and get it ready to start.
- Make sure that you're comfortable, so you can relax. Use pillows to support your arms.
- You may need to put a cloth under your breasts in case you leak some milk.
- Place the flange on the breast so that the nipple is right in the middle.
- Turn on the pump.
- It is best to imitate the way the baby sucks when breastfeeding. Your baby will start sucking fast and light to stimulate the let-down reflex. Once the milk flows, he will be sucking slow and deep. Therefore, start your pump 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. That can collapse your milk ducts and you get less milk.

- Pump for 15-20 minutes or until the milk stops flowing (see above under "duration").
- Turn off the pump first to release the vacuum, then remove the flange from your breast.
- Put some expressed milk on your nipple and let it air dry before putting on your bra.
- Clean your pump kit. ([Read handout "Cleaning Your Breast Pump."](#))
- Make sure you store and handle the expressed milk appropriately. ([Read handout "Storage and Handling of Breast Milk."](#))

How to Help Increase Milk Production when Pumping

It is more effective to pump more often than to pump for a longer period of time to stimulate milk production. If your milk supply isn't quite enough, try one or more of the methods below:

- Hands-on pumping. ([Read handout "Hands-on Pumping."](#))
- Power pumping: While continuing your normal pumping routine, choose a time of the day during which you pump more frequently:
 - Pump for 10-12 minutes. Rest. Pump again for 10-12 minutes. Rest. Do this twice a day.
 - Pump for 10-15 minutes per hour for 2-3 hours.
 - Pump every time you walk past your pump
- If you use a bilateral electric pump, remove the flanges when the milk flow becomes less. Massage the breasts and pump again. Repeat this once. After the second time, stop pumping when there are only drops of milk.
- If you use a single pump, consider using a bilateral electric pump. If this is not possible: Pump one breast until the milk flow reduces. Massage the breast and pump the other breast. Repeat this two to three times. Switching breasts will stimulate milk production.
- [Read handout "Increasing Breast Milk Supply."](#)

Keep Track of Your Milk In a Log

Keep track of your progress on a pumping log. It will tell you if you are pumping the expected amount or if you need to do more pumping to keep up an abundant breast milk supply.

Day Since Birth	Date & Time	Amount Pumped	Daily Total	Target
Day 1				drops
Day 2				drops
Day 3				25 - 75 ml
Day 4				75 - 150 ml
Day 5				150 - 225 ml
Day 6				225 - 300 ml
Day 7				300 - 375 ml
Day 8				375 - 450 ml
Day 9				450 - 525 ml
Day 10				525 - 600 ml
Day 11				600 - 650 ml
Day 12				650 - 700 ml
Day 13				700 - 750 ml
Day 14				750+ ml

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