

Fact Sheet

Breastfeeding: expressing breast milk

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Breastfeeding is the most effective way for your baby to remove milk from your breasts. However, there may be times when you need to express your breast milk, such as:

- to increase your milk supply
- if your baby is unwell, premature or unable to breastfeed well
- nipples are sore to feed from and you have decided to rest your nipples in order to heal them
- for breast comfort due to engorgement or separation from baby
- returning to work or study
- a special outing or event

Antenatal expressing

There are certain situations when a baby may need to be admitted to the Neonatal Intensive care unit soon after birth and/or have difficulties keeping their blood glucose levels normal.

If you have gestational diabetes (diabetes in pregnancy) or there is a possibility that your baby will be separated from you soon after birth you can talk to your **midwife or doctor** about expressing your milk during the antenatal period:

Guidelines for antenatal expressing:

- start expressing from 36 weeks gestation
- start with 3-5 minutes on each breast 2-3 times a day
- follow the instructions below for hand expressing
- **stop** expressing if you are having contractions at the same time and talk to your Midwife or doctor as soon as possible

Hand expressing

It is important for you to know how to express your breast milk. Hand expressing is a learned experience and is best done by you.

When you need to hand express:

- if you are separated from your baby
- if you are unable to give a breastfeed at the time your baby wants to feed
- if your baby has difficulties attaching, and is demanding a feed
- to soften your areola (darkened skin around nipple) to make attaching easier

Link to hand expressing video clip via Global Health Media:

<https://globalhealthmedia.org/portfolio-items/expressing-the-first-milk/>

How to increase your milk supply

How to hand express



- wash your hands with soap and water
- gently massage your breasts, starting from the top and stroking towards your nipple, not forgetting the underneath
- hold a sterile container under your breast to collect your milk

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- put your thumb and first finger opposite each other on your areola (coloured area surrounding your nipple) in the shape of a 'C'
- gently squeeze your thumb and finger together repeating in a rhythmic action
- when the flow stops move your finger and thumb to another position and repeat steps 4-6
- continue for 15-20 minutes
- it is important that you express for about 15-20 minutes on each breast as this helps to stimulate and maintain your milk supply
- it is important to continue expressing for this time, even when it appears that your milk has stopped flowing
- then change to other breast and repeat above steps

Choosing a Breast Pump: Manual or Electric

Manual Hand Pumps are portable and usually cost less than an electric pump. Many types are available and should be used according to the instructions.

Electric Breast Pumps - you can buy or hire from the Australian Breastfeeding Association or some chemists. Pump Hire Costs will include a refundable deposit and weekly hire. The breast pump kit to use with the pump is purchased separately. For long term expressing, most women find it cheaper to buy an electric pump.

Electric breast pumps are also available for use on the Postnatal Ward and the Neonatal Nursery at Westmead Hospital.

Using electric and hand pumps:

- wash your hands and then gently massage your breasts to stimulate the milk flow
- place the breast cup over the nipple
- if an electrical pump is being used, turning the power on starting on a lower pressure setting
- increasing the pressure
- be guided by how it feels
- if it's hurting the pressure may be too high or the breast cup is too small
- the breast cup is available in larger sizes. Most chemists stock these
- if you are using an electric / hand pump, you will be encouraged to also hand express as well

Care of the equipment

- after every use the pump kit must be rinsed, then washed in warm soapy water, rinsed well again and stored in a clean bag or container
- expressing equipment must not be shared between mothers for the safety of your baby.

Expressing at home

Your breast milk must be put into the fridge after each expression. This is to ensure that your milk remains cold.

Storing your breast milk

Breast milk can be safely stored in sealed containers or breast milk storage bags

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Table 1: Storing your breast milk

Breast Milk	Room Temperature (26 degrees Celsius or lower)	Refrigerator (4 degrees Celsius or lower)	Freezer
Freshly expressed into a closed container	When expressing for your baby in the hospital, store your labelled breast milk at your bedside to use for the next feed	At home store your breast milk for up to 3 days in the back of the fridge, where it is coolest.	2 weeks in freezer compartment inside refrigerator (-15°C). 3 months in freezer section of refrigerator with separate door (-18°C) 6 to 12 months in a chest or manual defrost deep freezer that is opened infrequently and maintains ideal temperature (-20°C)
Previously frozen thawed in refrigerator but not warmed	4 hours or less	Use within 24 hours	Do not refreeze
Thawed outside refrigerator in warm water	Use straight away do not store	4 hours or until next feeding	Do not refreeze
Baby has begun feeding	Discard when the feed is finished	Discard	Discard

Transporting breast milk

- store your milk in an insulated container, such as an esky with a frozen ice brick or gel pack
- if you are transporting frozen milk, do not use frozen water (ice) as it is not cold enough to use
- breast milk which is thawed or partially thawed cannot be refrozen and therefore must be fed to your baby or thrown out within 24 hours.

We welcome further feedback on this brochure as a way of continually improving our service.

Send your feedback to:

WSLHD-Get_Involved@health.nsw.gov.au