

# San Maternity

## Expressing & Storing Breast Milk

Breastfeeding Information – Handout 6

Updated October 2023

You can use either your hands or a breast pump to express (collect) milk from your breasts. Whether you choose to express by hand or pump may depend on the reason for expressing, how old your baby is, and how often you need to express.

Reasons for expressing may include:

- Baby is not latching or not sucking effectively
- You are separated from your baby
- Your baby needs extra fluid
- To increase supply
- Your nipples are too damaged to achieve a comfortable latch
- To soften a full breast to aid attachment
- Personal choice

The first milk you produce after your baby is born is called colostrum. Colostrum is very thick and sticky, so it is often removed better by hand expressing. In some circumstances however your midwife may also suggest pumping as well. For example, if your baby is not breastfeeding, hand expressing may remove colostrum to feed your baby, and pumping will help stimulate the breasts. Once the milk starts to increase in volume, pumping alone will often remove more milk more effectively and efficiently as mature milk flows easily.

The number of times you express and the length of time you spend expressing will depend on your circumstances. For example, if your newborn baby is not feeding from the breast at all you will need to express frequently to establish a good milk supply (At least 8 times over a 24hr period for at least 15mins per side). Once you are obtaining volumes that meet your babies needs you may be able to adjust the frequency and length of pumping sessions.

Your midwife or lactation consultant can help you to plan what might be best for you and your baby.

### Helpful tips

- Express whilst close to your baby, after skin to skin or whilst looking at photos or videos of your baby
- Gently massage the breasts prior to expressing
- Express in an environment you feel comfortable, safe, and relaxed. You may like to try relaxation techniques.
- Ensure you are not in pain when expressing
- Whilst expressing you may gently compress the breast to remove more milk
- Frequent expressing over 24hours is more effective at establishing a good supply of breastmilk than infrequent expressing, even if it is done for longer periods.

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### Hand expressing

Hand expressing is a useful skill to practice. The first time you hand express it may be helpful for a midwife to check your technique. You can collect colostrum in a clean container or syringe. It is important to note that if no colostrum is obtained, hand expressing still provides vital stimulation. You can watch a short video on how to hand express by scanning the QR code or following the link [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fs-WEgrLJF0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fs-WEgrLJF0).



### Manual (hand) pumps

Manual pumps are operated by hand and do not require a power source. They are compact, portable, and relatively inexpensive. However, manual pumps can only be used one side per time and as they require you to repetitively squeeze a handle to operate over a long period of time, they can be tiresome and slow. As such, manual pumps may be of benefit if you intend only to pump occasionally.



Inexpensive silicone milk catchers are also available. These are designed to collect milk leaking from the breast or draw out small amounts of milk by negative pressure. They are not as efficient as a manual or electric breast pump.

### Electric pumps

Electric breast pumps can be purchased online or instore, hired from the Australian Breastfeeding Association or hired from a pharmacy in your area. You may wish to consider an electric breast pump if you are needing to pump frequently or long term. There are various types of breast pumps on the market that suit different needs. They can be loosely grouped into the following categories:

#### ■ Hospital Grade models

These pumps have large motors that connect to the expressing kit via tubing. They are the most powerful and efficient, but they are also heavy and hard to transport. They are designed to be used by more than one user. They often require an electrical outlet however some also have a rechargeable battery offering more mobility and convenience. They offer the ability to pump both breasts at once but can be used on one side per time if preferred. Women may consider a compatible pumping bra to make these pumps hands free.



#### ■ Retail models with an external motor

These pumps often have smaller motors that connect to the expressing kit via tubing. They are often small, making them light and portable. They are designed to be used by the purchaser only. They can be plugged to an electrical outlet and have rechargeable battery. They may offer the ability to pump one breast or both breasts at the same time. Women may consider a compatible pumping bra to make these pumps hands free.



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### Wearable pumps

These pumps have small motors attached directly to the expressing kit. They are light and designed to fit in a bra so that they are completely hands free. However, as the motor is smaller, there are some concerns they may not remove milk as efficiently as pumps with a larger motor.



### Breast shield (flange) size

A breast shield (flange) is the plastic piece that is in contact with your breast. The breast shield (flange) should form a seal on the breast creating a vacuum which draws the nipple into the funnel to extract milk from the breast. It is important to ensure you have the correct breast shield (flange) size to ensure the pump is effective and comfortable. You can watch a short video on how to hand express by scanning the QR code or following the link <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TpAnNNpRwx8>.



### Storing breast milk at home

Breast milk can be stored in plastic containers, including sealable, sterile plastic bags. Freshly expressed milk can be chilled in the refrigerator and added to frozen milk from the freezer. When combining milk, it is important to use the milk by the date and time the first milk was expressed. The following is a simple guide for mothers storing expressed breast milk at home:

BREAST MILK	ROOM TEMPERATURE	REFRIGERATOR	FREEZER
Freshly expressed, in a closed container	6 – 8 hours if the temperature is 26°C or lower. If refrigeration is available, this is a better storage options for milk	72 hours if the refrigerator temperature is 4°C or lower – store in the back section rather than in the door	3 months in freezer section of refrigerator with a separate door 6-12 months in deep freeze (-18 C)
Previously frozen – thawed in refrigerator but not warmed	4 hours or less (i.e. the next feed)	Store in refrigerator 24 hours	Do not refreeze
Thawed outside refrigerator in warm water	For current feed	Store for four hours or until next feed	Do not refreeze
Infant has begun feeding	Only for current feed	Discard	Discard

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### Feeding with expressed breast milk

Expressed breast milk can be fed to the baby with a syringe (<5-10mls) or bottle (>5-10mls).

If you wish to introduce a bottle, we suggest a wide-necked peristaltic teat for breastfed babies. These teats help keep support the baby to feed in a way that eases the transition between breast and bottle. One method of bottle feeding that may also support this is paced feeding. You can watch a short video on paced feeding by scanning the QR code or following the link [www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGPm5SpLxXY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGPm5SpLxXY).



You can prepare expressed milk for your baby by:

- Warm the milk by placing the cup/bottle in a container of hot, not boiling water
- Gently swirl the milk to combine any separated fat
- Test after a minute or two by placing a few drops on the inside of your wrist. It should be body temperature, or just a little warmer

**Do not use a microwave to thaw or heat milk as this heats milk unevenly and can lead to accidental burning.**

If offering a full feed of expressed milk, the amount will depend on the baby's age and weight. After day 6, you can use the following equation as a guide to how much to offer your baby at a feed:

Baby's heaviest weight x 150mls per kilogram  
Number of feeds per day

### Transporting breast milk

If you need to transport breast milk, you may do so in an insulated container (an esky with a freezer brick). Once thawed breastmilk should be used within 24hrs.

### References and for more information

**NHMRC Infant Feeding Guidelines for Health Workers (2012)**

#### Australian Breastfeeding Association

p: 1800 686 268 - Breastfeeding Helpline

w: [www.breastfeeding.asn.au](http://www.breastfeeding.asn.au)

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