

Expressing Breast Milk

How to express and store breast milk

Expressing breast milk can be handy if you are away from your baby for any reason*.

You can express breast milk by hand or by using a manual or electric breast pump.

Prepare for expressing breast milk

Whether you are expressing breast milk by hand or using a pump. Start by washing your hands and preparing your breasts.

1. Wash your hands with soap and warm water.
2. Dry your hands with a clean towel, paper towel or hand dryer.
3. Gently massage your breast. Start at the top and stroke toward the nipple. Massage the underside too and repeat several times to make sure the whole breast is massaged.

Expressing breast milk by hand

1. Hold a clean plastic dish under your breast to collect the milk.
2. Place thumb on edge of areola with fingers opposite.
3. Gently press inwards toward the centre of the breast, squeezing the finger and thumb together.
4. Repeat with a rhythmic rolling movement, the fingers should not slide over or pinch the skin.

5. Once the milk flow has stopped, move the fingers around the nipple and press again. This helps express more milk and empties all parts of the breast.
6. Repeat the process on the other breast. If you need more milk, change from breast to breast until you get the amount of milk needed, or wait and try again later.
7. Pour the breast milk into a container and put in the refrigerator.

Expressing breast milk by hand pump

1. Place the flat rim of the breast cup on the breast, with the nipple in the middle.
2. Gently work the pump with a smooth action, pulling the piston and releasing the suction rhythmically. By releasing the suction, blood will keep following into the nipple area.
3. Keep working the pump until the breast is soft and about half the amount of milk needed is expressed.
4. Change to the other breast and repeat the process, starting with the gentle massage. If more milk is needed, change from breast to breast until you get the amount of milk needed, or wait and try again later.
5. Pour the breast milk into a container and put in the refrigerator.

Expressing breast milk with an electric pump

1. Place the breast cup on the breast, with the nipple in the middle.
2. Slowly increase the suction strength, as long as it is not uncomfortable.
3. Continue until the breast is soft and about half the amount of milk you need is collected.
4. Change the cup to the other breast, turning the suction to low and repeat the process, beginning with the gentle breast massage. If more milk is needed, change from breast to breast until you get the amount of milk needed or wait and try again later.
5. Pour the collected milk into a storage container and put in the refrigerator.

Storing breast milk

You can store freshly expressed breast milk:

- at room temperature for six to eight hours
- in the fridge for up to 72 hours
- in the freezer for up to three months
- in a deep freeze for six months to a year.

Sterilising bottles and equipment

All bottles and teats need to be sterilised to kill germs and make sure they are safe to use.

1. Wash bottles, teats and caps in hot soapy water, with a bottle or teat brush.
2. Place bottles, teats and caps in a saucepan on the stove.
3. Cover with water. Bring water to the boil, and boil for five minutes.
4. Let bottles, teats and caps cool in the saucepan, then remove, and use them.
5. Store any equipment not used in a clean container in the refrigerator.

Any equipment not used within a day should be re-sterilised.

Thawing expressed breast milk

Thaw breast milk in the refrigerator. Thawed breast milk can be kept in the refrigerator for 24 hours, or at room temperature for four hours.

You can also thaw frozen breast milk by sitting it in warm water. If you thaw breast milk this way, use it within four hours and throw any leftovers away at the end of the next feed.

Once you have thawed frozen breast milk, do not re-freeze it.

Warming up expressed breast milk

Thawed expressed breast milk may be warmed before feeding. To do this put the bottle upright in a container of warm water.

Do not use the microwave or stovetop to heat up milk, as this can cause hot spots in the milk and may burn your baby's mouth.

Want to know more

Call the Breastfeeding 24 hour Helpline on 1800 mum 2 mum (1800 686 268) for immediate advice.

Ask your midwife, lactation consultant, child health nurse or GP.

* if you are expressing for a premature or sick baby you need to seek professional help about how much to express, equipment required and storage of breast milk for the baby.