

HOW TO COLLECT AND STORE BREAST MILK



Postpartum Parent
Support Program

**Information
Sheet**

Canada

You want to be able to feed your baby breast milk, but there may be times when you will be unable to be there at feeding time. You can express and store your own breast milk for use at a later date.

For storing and freezing breast milk, hard plastic and glass containers or bags made especially for freezing breast milk can be used. Clean containers and their lids by washing them in hot soapy water, then rinse well and let air dry or use the sani-cycle on your dishwasher to clean containers. Label containers or bags with the date and time pumped. Some mothers prefer to take their baby with them when they go out and do not need to express their milk.

Expressing Breast Milk

Breast milk can be expressed by hand or by pump. Both ways, hand or pump, take a little patience and practice. A warm cloth, breast massage and stimulating the nipple with the palm of your hand may help milk to flow. Expressing right after your baby has nursed, especially in the morning when the level of prolactin (the milk-making hormone) is highest may produce the most milk.

Expressing by Hand:

- Wash your hands thoroughly.
- Choose a comfortable place to sit.
- Have a clean container available to collect your milk.
- Using the palm and fingers of your hand, gently massage the outer portion of your breast in a circular fashion (10 to 20 circles) or stroke your breast lengthwise from chest wall to nipple. This helps stimulate your hormones to let your milk flow.
- Cup your breast in your hand, with your thumb above your nipple and your fingers below. Press your fingers to find the sacs that will release the milk (they are usually about an inch from the base of the nipple).
- Press inward towards your chest and gently squeeze your thumb and fingers together in a rolling-like action. This copies your baby's tongue and jaw action at your breast. Milk will be released in a fine spray.
- Repeat this action, rotating your hand around your breast until it feels soft.
- Repeat with the other breast.

Expressing by Pump

There are a number of different breast pumps available: hand, battery and electric. Discuss with the nurse in hospital, the community (public) health nurse, a La Leche

League leader or lactation consultant which type of pump is best for you to use and how to use it. All pumps must be cleaned after every pumping. Follow the manufacturer's instructions about pumping pressure and cleaning for safe use of commercial pumps. Pumping should not hurt. Avoid using the bicycle horn trumpet-shaped pump as it is difficult to sterilize and may damage your nipples.

Storing and Freezing Breast Milk

- Refrigerate or freeze each expression of breast milk in hard plastic or glass containers with date and time expressed.
- Expressed breast milk can be stored (in a sealed container or freezer bag) in the refrigerator for up to 3 days.
- For longer storage, freeze in sealed containers marked with the date expressed. When filling containers, leave room at the top (about 1 inch) as milk expands with freezing.
- If you have a self-contained freezer unit on your refrigerator, you can store the frozen breast milk for up to 2-3 months.
- If you have a separate deep-freeze (-18 degrees C), you can store the frozen milk for up to 6 months.
- Breast milk which has been stored has a different taste, smell and appearance from fresh breast milk. If it has been properly stored, it will be safe for the baby.

How to Use Frozen Milk

- Always use the oldest container of frozen milk first, providing it has not passed the expiry date.
- Thaw milk in the refrigerator and use within 24 hours. When ready to use, place container under warm running water to bring to room temperature. Test a drop of warmed breast milk on your arm.
- Milk can also be thawed in a bowl of warm water for 5 minutes and used right away.
- Before using, gently mix warmed milk to blend any cream that has risen to the top.
- Milk that has been warmed should be used within an hour or thrown out.
- Do not re-freeze thawed milk.
- Breast milk should not be heated in a microwave oven. Microwave ovens heat liquids unevenly causing hot spots in the milk that may burn the baby's mouth and throat.

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