



expressing and storing breastmilk

There may be times where you need to express your milk such as when:

- your baby was born prematurely or is unwell
- your baby is unable to suck well
- you and your baby are separated
- your breasts are too full and uncomfortable
- you want to increase the amount of breastmilk or relactate (starting to make milk again after a period of not breastfeeding or not expressing)
- you return to work, study or other commitments.

Expressing can be done by hand or using a breast pump (hand pump or electric).

Talk to your child health nurse, lactation consultant or an Australian Breastfeeding Association counsellor for more information about expressing, storing, cleaning equipment, transporting and preparing expressed breastmilk for your baby.

Hand expressing

1. Wash your hands with soap and water, and dry well.
2. Use a clean container to collect the milk.
3. Encourage the let-down reflex by expressing in a quiet, relaxing area.

Gently massage your breasts by stroking towards the nipple and gently rolling your nipple between your finger and thumb.

Looking at your baby, or thinking about your baby, may also help with the let-down reflex.



4. Position your finger and thumb about 2 to 3 centimetres behind the tip of the nipple.

Press your finger and thumb together towards your chest, without sliding your fingers on your skin, and gently squeeze.



5. Repeat this action in a rhythm similar to the baby's sucking – about once a second.
6. Rotate the position of your finger and thumb around the nipple, so that all the milk ducts are expressed.

Expressing with an electric breast pump

If you are expressing frequently, you may like to consider using an electric breast pump.

You can hire pumps from the Australian Breastfeeding Association and pharmacies.

If you will be expressing often and for a long time, consider buying your own electric breast pump.

1. Wash your hands with soap and water, and dry well.
2. Put the clean expressing equipment together.
3. Ensure the correct breast shield size is used – if it is too small it may damage your nipple and may not drain the breast properly.
4. You may like to encourage the let-down reflex before using the pump. See point 3 in the hand expressing section.
5. Start with low suction and gradually increase until you find the level that works best and is most comfortable for you.
6. Some pumps can express both breasts at once, which may be quicker.
7. You need to express your breastmilk from both breasts as often as you expect your baby to feed.
 - Express at least 8 times a day if your baby is not breastfeeding
 - Express between feeds if you need to increase your milk volume.

How often and how much?

How much you need to express depends on your reason for expressing.

- If you are expressing to relieve full breasts, just express enough to feel comfortable.
- If you are expressing for a premature baby or for a baby who is unable to breastfeed, you will need to express fully and often.

Some mothers express large volumes every few hours, while others find it easier to express small amounts more often.

Other mothers prefer to 'power pump'. This is when you express several times in a 2 to 3 hour period.

Expressing more often (frequency) may increase the milk volume better than spending a longer time (duration) expressing at each session.

Choose an expressing pattern that suits you, and keep expressing for a few minutes after the milk flow has stopped.

It is important not to judge breastmilk production by the amount of milk you can express. A healthy baby is better at draining the breast than a breast pump.

Storing breastmilk for home use

- Store freshly expressed breastmilk in a clean, closable container.
- Cool breastmilk in the fridge before adding it to other chilled or frozen breastmilk.
- Write the date you expressed the breastmilk on the container.
Use the oldest milk first.
- Use breastmilk within:
 - 6 to 8 hours at room temperature (26 °C or lower). If there is a fridge available, store breastmilk there.
 - 3 days if kept at the back of the fridge where it is coldest (not in the door).
- You can freeze freshly expressed breastmilk for:
 - 2 weeks in the freezer compartment inside a fridge
 - 3 months in the freezer of a fridge with a separate freezer door
 - 6-12 months in a deep freeze.



Cleaning equipment

You do not have to disinfect or sterilise your own expressing equipment if you have a healthy term baby.

- If you are expressing several times a day, rinse the equipment in cold water after use and store in a clean, closed container.
- If you have a fridge, you can store the unrinsed expressing equipment in a clean, closed container or plastic bag.
- If you are expressing only once a day or less, clean it after every use.

Clean expressing equipment really well at least once every 24 hours.

- Wash your hands well with soap and water, and dry well.
- Take the equipment apart and rinse the parts in cold water. Wash in hot water with a small amount of dishwashing liquid – you can use a brush.
- Rinse twice in hot water.
- Drain equipment upside-down on a clean cloth/paper towel, cover and air dry.
- Store equipment in a new plastic bag, plastic wrap or clean container.
- If you use an electric breast pump, do not wet any electrical parts and follow the manufacturer's cleaning instructions.

Talk to your doctor, child health nurse, lactation consultant or Australian Breastfeeding Association counsellor about cleaning expressing equipment if:

- your baby is sick
- you or your baby has thrush
- you have a nipple infection.

Transporting breastmilk

- Use an insulated container (Esky) with a freezer brick.
- If breastmilk is still frozen on arrival, put it in the fridge or freezer (depending on when you plan to use it).
- If some of the frozen breastmilk has thawed, put it in the fridge and use within 4 hours.
- ✗ **Do not re-freeze breastmilk that has begun to thaw.**

Preparing expressed breastmilk for your baby

- Warm the container of cold breastmilk in a bowl of warm water.
- Frozen expressed breastmilk can be warmed quickly by placing in a bowl of warm water. As the water cools, add a little hot water to the bowl. Keep moving the container until all the breastmilk becomes liquid. Once thawed, store in the fridge for no more than 4 hours, and warm as for cold breastmilk.
- You can thaw frozen milk slowly in the fridge, and store it for up to 24 hours in the fridge.
- ✗ **Do not use a microwave oven to thaw or heat breastmilk.**
- ✗ **Do not freeze or heat breastmilk more than once.**
- Offer your baby small amounts of breastmilk at a time so you don't have to throw away any of the feed he doesn't finish. If she needs more, just prepare another small amount.
- Breastmilk will form layers after it has been standing – this separation of the milk is normal. Gently swirl it to mix it again.

For more information contact

- **HealthyWA**
www.healthywa.wa.gov.au
- **Local child health nurse**
They can also refer you to a Lactation Consultant
- **Local family doctor**
- **Australian Breastfeeding Association**
(24 hours, 7 days a week)
Helpline – 1800 686 268
www.breastfeeding.asn.au
- **Ngala Parenting Line** (8am–8pm everyday)
(08) 9368 9368 (Outside metro 1800 111 546)
www.ngala.com.au
- **Raising Children Network**
www.raisingchildren.net.au

We've used 'he' and 'she' in turn - please change to suit your child.

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability.

This publication is provided for general education and information purposes. Contact a qualified healthcare professional for any medical advice needed.

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