

Patient Information Leaflet

How To Express Your Breastmilk

Produced By: NICU

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How To Express Your Breastmilk

This leaflet will show you how to express your breast milk so that you can provide the best start for your baby. If your baby is breastfeeding well, he/she will be better at getting all the milk from your breasts. Because of this, expressing breastmilk may take a little longer than breastfeeding your baby.

There are many reasons why mothers express breastmilk for their babies:-

- Your baby may not yet be able to suck effectively due to prematurity or illness.
- You may go home before your baby if he/she is in the NICU.
- You might be using a breast pump to increase your milk supply, restart or induce lactation.

How often should you express?

If you are expressing for a newborn baby, try to express often, between 8-12 times in 24 hours. At first you will only get a small amount of milk called Colostrum, in some instances this is easier to obtain by hand expression. (See Hand Expression). A small amount of Colostrum is normal for your newborn baby as he/she only has a stomach that holds a very small amount. Premature babies need even less. The more milk you take out of your breasts, the more milk you will make. You may find it easier to express for shorter periods at first but more often. The number of times you express is more important than the length of time spent expressing. Many mothers find a routine of expressing every 2-3 hours during the day, with a session just before going to bed, works for them. It is also beneficial to express at least once during the night as your hormones are higher at this time. Milk supply and response to expressing vary between mothers, so you may have to try different timing to find a pattern that suits you. Each session may be up to about 20 minutes, or until the milk flow has slowed down plus another 1 -2 minutes to allow for the fat enriched hindmilk to be collected.

How breastmilk is made

An important factor in making milk, and being able to express breastmilk, is *the let-down reflex*. This causes the milk to be released from the milk glands. When your baby sucks at your breast, nerves send a message to your brain, which causes the hormone Oxytocin to be released. The let-down reflex happens when this hormone makes the cells around the milk glands tighten and squeeze the milk out. It is possible to start this reflex without a baby sucking, but it can be slowed by pain, tension or stress. When expressing you can help the let-down reflex work by trying to relax and taking deep breaths; think about your baby or better still have skin to skin time with your baby. If your baby is premature or unwell and cannot be cuddled, then try holding a blanket or toy that has been next to your baby that smells of him/her. Massaging your breasts may also help. As milk is removed from your breasts, more milk will be made.

Hand Expression

Hand expression is an ideal method of expressing in the first few days as the first milk, the Colostrum, is very thick and creamy may get 'lost' in a milk collection set. Also milk that has been expressed by hand tends to have a higher fat content than milk expressed by pump. Some women may find it helpful to massage their breasts prior to hand expressing. Massage should be gentle and not involve dragging of the skin.

- Firstly wash your hands.
- To hand express you will need to gently feel your breasts to find the right spot. Usually this is about an inch or so back from the nipple. Sometimes women can feel that there is a difference in the tissue at this point.



- You may have to experiment and find the best place through some gentle trial and error.
- When you have found the right spot, make a 'C' shape with your thumb and the rest of your fingers. Gently squeeze and compress the breast, then release the pressure to express the milk.
- Continue in a rhythmic motion moving round the breast as if moving them around a clock face.
- You may need to press back towards the chest wall to achieve compression.
- Continue until your milk starts to flow, initially only a few drops of Colostrum may be collected but with time and practice your milk volume will increase and the milk will start to flow.
- Collect the milk in a sterile or well cleaned container.
- A good time to switch from hand expressing to an electric breast pump is when you are collecting about 7mls.
- Hand expressing is a useful technique to learn in case of any later problems such as engorgement or mastitis. Also if a pump is not immediately available.

Using the Ameda Elite Breast Pump



The breast pump used in this hospital is the Ameda Elite. It is a compact and lightweight pump that has easy to use controls and is easy to clean. The pump allows you to control the suction and cycling speed to closely simulate a baby's sucking pattern.

It is crucial that your first breast feed or milk expression should take place as soon as possible following delivery. You will be given a sterile ready-to-use milk collection set (see Diagram 1) and a member of staff will show you how to assemble the pieces.

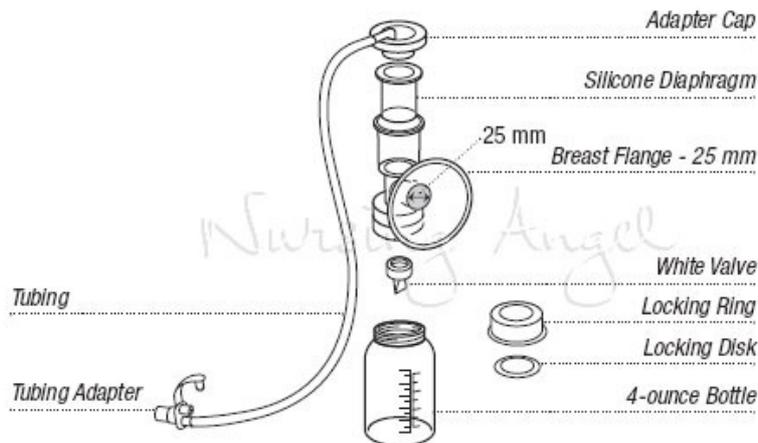


Diagram 1

- Sit comfortably with your back straight as this prevents milk from going into the tubing.
- Ease your nipple in to the funnel. Make sure your nipple is in the centre of the funnel and is not too tight.
- Keep the funnel close enough to maintain a seal with your skin, without forcing it onto your breast.
- Switch the pump on; turn the cycle up to maximum as this mimics the sucking action of a baby, to initiate the let down reflex.
- Be patient. It often takes a few minutes for your milk to flow.
- Increase the suction to a level that is comfortable but not to a level that friction occurs. You may find you need to reduce the suction as the bottle fills as the negative pressure inside the bottle increases.
- As the milk starts to flow decrease the cycles again to mimic the sucking action of your baby.
- Pump until the milk flow slows down or stops and then continue to pump for a further 1-2 minutes to completely empty the breast.
- Swap to the other breast and repeat the process.
- Remember to switch the pump off before removing!

With the Ameda Elite it is possible to express from both breasts at the same time. This is thought to result in a higher milk yield, reduced pumping time and higher hormone levels. If you wish to try this then ask a member of staff for another milk collection set.

Storing Breastmilk

- Bottles of breastmilk must be clearly labelled with the baby's name, date and time of expression.
- Whilst in hospital, expressed milk should be stored in the designated milk fridge in the milk kitchen, at 4° or below. It must not be stored in the fridge door as the

temperature will fluctuate. If your baby is premature or poorly we will only refrigerate the milk for no longer than 24 hours.

- Milk expressed at home for a well, term infant may be stored up to 5 days in a refrigerator at 4° or less.
- Whilst in hospital, any milk that is unlikely to be used within 24 hours should be stored in a designated freezer, labelled appropriately and kept at a temperature of less than -20°
- Frozen expressed milk should ideally be thawed in the fridge. If it is required quickly then it may be defrosted under cool running water and used immediately.
- Expressed breastmilk that has been defrosted in a refrigerator can be stored for up to 12 hours.
- If transporting expressed breastmilk from home to the hospital, please store the milk in a cool bag.

References

UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative

The Breastfeeding Network

NICE Guidelines for Storage and Handling of Expressed Breastmilk (2010)

You can get further information on all sorts of health issues through NHS interactive available through Sky TV or online at: <http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/>

For Health advice and out of hours GP service please call the NHS 111 service on: 111

We Value Your Views On Our Service

If you wish to comment on the care which you, your relative or friend has received, we will be pleased to hear from you. Please speak to the person in charge of the ward, clinic or service in the first instance or ask them to contact the Quality Team. If you wish to contact them directly, telephone on 534850.

Alternatively you may prefer to write to:

Chief Executive
Isle Of Wight NHS Trust
St Mary's Hospital
Newport
Isle of Wight
PO30 5TG

All NHS sites are no smoking areas.

If you would like help and advice to stop smoking please call: Freephone 0800 169 0 169 to talk to the NHS Smoking Helpline.

Ref: **NICU/Ex/1**