

# Expressing your breastmilk

**This leaflet explains about how to express breast milk for your baby. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a midwife or nurse caring for your baby.**

Breast milk provides both comfort and nutrition. It is easy for babies who are premature or sick to digest and is full of living properties that help to protect your baby from infection.

## Expressing in the early days

You have been given this leaflet because you have been advised to express your breastmilk for your baby. There are lots of reasons why expressing your breastmilk might be needed or helpful.

- Your baby might have been admitted to the neonatal unit.
- Your baby is not ready to feed yet.
- You or your baby may have a health condition that means you need extra care.

For the first few days you will be asked to hand express into a syringe as colostrum is small in quantity and quite thick in consistency. It is also really useful to know how to effectively hand express as it can be used for tempting babies to feed at the breast. Hand expressing also helps relieve

- blocked ducts, which is a small lump or sore spot in the breast which happens when milk does not flow easily
- engorgement, which is when your breasts become overfull with milk, they may feel hard, painful or swollen
- mastitis, which is an inflammation of the breast where you may feel an area of the breast is sore, hot, red and you may experience flu-like symptoms, headache, fever, shivers.

Pump expressing can be used once your milk is in and as milk flow increases.

## When to start expressing

If your baby has been admitted to the Neonatal Unit (NNU) or Paediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) or children's ward after birth, expressing should be started by the time your baby is two hours old, or as soon as possible after this time.

There are two main hormones that are important in breastmilk production. Prolactin helps make your milk, and oxytocin releases your milk from your breast. Both hormones are stimulated by removal of milk, touching your baby and being close to them, breast massage and nipple stimulation. The more frequently you express, the more breastmilk you will make.

## Hygiene

Before expressing make sure you wash your hands. Remember that babies who are premature or unwell are at higher risk of getting an infection.

## How to hand express



### Breast Massage

The first step is to start by gently massaging your breast using your fingers.



Try cupping your breast with your hands and moving gently from side to side or make a spiralling motion from the nipple back up the breast.



Be careful not to push or rub too hard as this may make you feel sore. Make sure that you move your hands all around the breast and particularly on and around the nipple.



### Finding the right spot

Use two fingers to measure from the base of the nipple, this is usually about 2-3cm. The edge of the finger furthest away from the nipple is where you are going to compress, this is where your milk ducts are.



Make a 'C' shape with your finger and thumb over the milk ducts.



### Squeeze and release

Gently but firmly press your finger and thumb together without moving their position for about two seconds. Release the pressure and repeat, building up a rhythm. Do not slide your fingers over the skin or nipple.



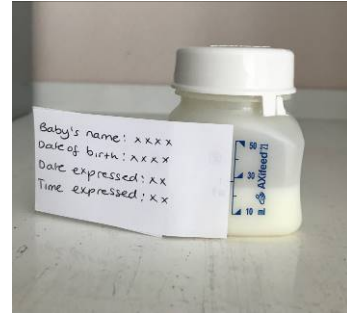
### Move around the breast

Once the milk flow slows or stops, move your fingers and thumb to a slightly different position, still about 2-3cm back from the nipple and repeat the squeeze and release in this area. Continue to move around the breast as the milk flow slows or stops.

If you don't see any milk, you might not be reaching your milk ducts. Try adjusting your hand position slightly and try again.

## How to collect your breastmilk

As you see the milk drops collecting like small beads on the nipple use a small syringe to collect it. You can either suck it into the syringe by pulling on the plunger or remove the plunger, put a bung on the end of the syringe and use it as a scoop. As your milk volumes increase, milk can be collected in a bottle.



You may find it helpful to watch the following film clip to see a mum expressing by hand.



<https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/breastfeeding-resources/hand-expression-v>

## How long to express for

There is no set length of time to express for. Once you have worked your way around the breast and no longer see any milk drops or they have slowed down considerably, move to the other breast and repeat the process again, starting with breast massage.

## How often to express

Babies feed frequently, therefore you should aim to express approximately 8-12 times in a 24 hour period to mimic your baby's feeding pattern.

You do not need to set fixed time periods for expressing. Instead try and fit it in with your daily routine. This might mean that in some parts of the day you express more frequently with slightly longer gaps at other times. Try to have gaps of no longer than four hours during the day and six hours at night. It is important to express at least once during the night, between the hours of 2am and 4am as your body releases a surge of prolactin. Remember that babies usually wake and feed throughout the day and night so this is setting you up to responsively breastfeed your baby.

## Storing your breast milk

When you have collected your breast milk use a sticky label and attach it to the syringe. Write this information onto it.

- Baby's name
- Baby's date of birth
- Date milk expressed
- Time milk expressed

If you are in hospital, give the milk to the nurse or midwife caring for you or your baby and they will store it in the milk fridge or freezer until it is time to use it. If you are expressing at home, keep it in the back of the fridge and bring it to the hospital in a cool bag that has a freezer block to keep it cool.

Follow the information from the Breast Feeding Network on how long milk can be kept out of the fridge, in the fridge or in the freezer at home.

- At room temperature for up to six hours
- In a fridge at temperature of 5-10 degrees C for three days
- In a fridge at temperature of 0-4 degrees C for eight days
- In a freezer at -18 degrees C for six months

[https://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/wp-content/pdfs/BFNExpressing\\_and\\_Storing.pdf](https://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/wp-content/pdfs/BFNExpressing_and_Storing.pdf)

## Expressing using a breast pump

Around three to five days after giving birth, the amount of breastmilk you produce will start to increase. You might find collecting milk in larger amounts is easier to do by pump. In the hospital there are breast pumps available for you to use to express your breastmilk. You can either use a pump and express next to your baby's bedside or use the expressing room. The expressing room has a number of pumps available and although you may be expressing there at the same time as other mothers, it can be a more private and quiet space.

### Choosing the right funnel size

There are two funnel sizes available, 26mm and 31mm. To make sure you have the right size funnel for you, place the shield on your breast with the nipple in the centre. When the pump is switched on, the nipple should not rub against the sides of the shield (the funnel is too small) and only a small amount of breast tissue should enter the funnel (if a lot of breast tissue enters the funnel, the funnel is too big). A nurse or midwife can help you check you have the right size.

### Getting started

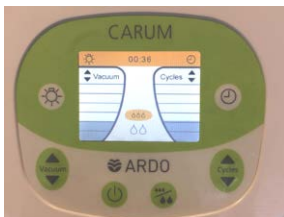
As with hand expressing hygiene is important. Clean the pump using a Clinell wipe and then wash your hands. Attach a sterile bottle to the expressing kit to collect the milk. Before pumping make sure that you massage your breast for 2-3 minutes to stimulate your milk supply. Remember to be gentle and to make sure you stimulate the nipple.



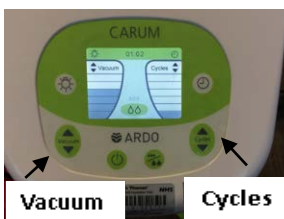
Insert the expressing kit tube into one of the holes on the front of the pump. If double pumping, use two kits and insert one into each hole.



Fit the shield to your breast and press the ON button.



The pump will start in 'stimulation' mode. The top line of the screen is orange in this mode. The cycles will be quite fast but also gentle. This will run for two minutes. It will then automatically switch to 'expression' mode.



In expression mode use the down arrow marked cycles to turn the cycles down low. Use the up arrow marked vacuum to increase the suction to a comfortable level for you. In this mode the top line is green. When you have completed expressing from one breast, switch the pump off and move to the other breast and start again.

When you have finished expressing, label the bottle as described earlier and give to the nurse or midwife caring for you or your baby. Clean the pump again with a Clinell wipe and wash your hands.

### **How long to express for**

There is no minimum or maximum amount of time to express for. The stimulation phase on the pump imitates how a baby sucks gently but quickly when they attach at the breast. You might find that your milk starts to flow during the stimulation phase, or you may not see any milk flow until the expression phase starts and you have changed the cycles and vacuum to your requirements. Every woman's 'let down' (also known as the milk ejection reflex) happens at a different time, so try not to compare yourself, and the amount of milk you produce, to others. You should continue in expression mode until you see the milk flow slow or stop. To help maximise your milk supply, express from each breast twice.

### **How to clean the expressing kits after use**

After you have used the expressing kit it will need to be washed. Please see the guidance in the area your baby is being cared for, or speak to a member of staff.

### **Supporting milk production**

Expressing breastmilk in hospital can be stressful, especially if your baby is unwell. The oxytocin hormone does not flow easily if your stress hormones are high. To help the release of oxytocin hormone try and find ways that help you relax before and when expressing. For example, listen to music that you like and helps you to feel calm, if you are not next to your baby look at a picture or film of them, have a bonding square or one of your baby's blankets close by.

Double pumping (expressing from both breasts at the same time using a breast pump) reduces the amount of time it takes to express and makes the most of the let-down/milk ejection reflex that happens in both breasts.

Have regular skin to skin / kangaroo care with your baby. Skin to skin has been shown to increase milk supply in lactating mothers and increases the likelihood of exclusive breastfeeding. Speak to staff for more information or take a look at the Bliss booklet skin-to-skin with your premature baby.

<https://shop.bliss.org.uk/en/products/parent-resources/skin-to-skin-with-your-premature-baby>

The best way to support milk production is with your baby at the breast. As soon as your baby is able and showing signs they are ready to feed offer the breast frequently and responsively.

### **Expressing in the neonatal unit**

In the NNU it might be helpful to keep a record of the times you express and record the amount of milk you collect. This will help you to see how much milk you are making over a whole day and to see volumes are increasing gradually each day. By the time your baby is 14 days old the amount of milk you produce each day will be around 750mls or more. In the NNU, staff will carry out an expressing assessment four times in the first two weeks. This helps to pick up any problems you are having early and allows us to make suggestions that may help increase your supply.

### **Information for dads, partners and family members**

Support from the people around you can make a big difference to your experience of expressing. It is helpful for the people supporting you to understand what is involved with expressing and how milk production works. Encourage them to read this leaflet so that they can help and support you during this time. Talk to each other about what help feels right for you.

These are some examples of how those close to you can help you. Expressing takes time and energy so give expressing mums lots of encouragement. Help with the practical side of things. While mum is hand expressing dad can use the syringe to collect the milk, store it or take it to the staff. Help with getting expressing equipment ready and cleaning it after use. Help mums to get some rest and make sure they find time to eat and drink.

## Useful sources of information

<https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/>

<https://shop.bliss.org.uk/>

<https://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/>

<https://www.laleche.org.uk/>

<https://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/our-services/maternity/after-your-baby-is-born/feeding-your-baby.aspx>

### Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about expressing, please contact the care team caring for your baby.

Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital Main switch board **t:** 020 7188 7188

Neonatal Unit **t:** 020 7188 4045

Breastfeeding team (maternity) **t:** 020 7188 7564

Postnatal Ward **t:** 020 7188 5149

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit **w:** [www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets)

### Evelina London Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's medicines, please speak to the staff caring for them or contact our helpline.

**t:** 020 7188 3003, Monday to Friday, 10am to 5pm **e:** [letstalkmedicines@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:letstalkmedicines@gstt.nhs.uk)

### Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

**t:** 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)

**t:** 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** [complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk)

### Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch. **t:** 020 7188 8815 **e:** [languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk)

### NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day. **t:** 111 **w:** [111.nhs.uk](http://111.nhs.uk)

### NHS website

Online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing. **w:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

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