

# Expressing your breast milk

## Introduction

Breastfeeding is important for your baby, but you cannot always be sure you will be able to feed your baby when needed, so it is helpful to learn how to express, store and use your breast milk in the early days of having a baby.

If you are separated from your baby or your baby is reluctant or unable to breastfeed ideally you should try and be supported to:

- start expressing within 2 hours of birth
- express at least 8-10 times in 24 hours
- express once at night

This will help to stimulate and maintain your milk supply.

All breast milk collected is beneficial to your baby. Initially the volume of colostrum (the thick, rich early milk in the first few days) can be as little as 1ml but will increase as you continue to express regularly. This can be done by using your hands to massage your breasts or by using a pump, your breast milk can then be stored in your fridge. The most appropriate method of giving your breast milk to your baby will be discussed with you after you have expressed.

## Hand Expressing

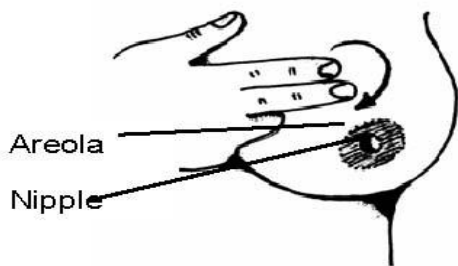
### Preparation

#### Before you start

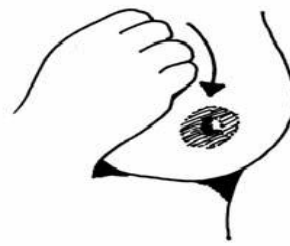
- Wash your hands thoroughly.
- Ensure any equipment for collecting and storing your breast milk has been washed in hot soapy water or is pre sterilised and unopened before use.
- It is helpful to have a clean, damp cloth and dry tissues close by in case there are accidental splashes or spillages of milk which can occur particularly with hand expressing.

#### To encourage your milk to flow:

- Find a warm, comfortable and relaxing place to sit.
- Hold your baby ideally with skin-to-skin contact, have baby nearby or have a photo of baby which you can see.
- Apply warm flannels to your breasts or have a warm bath if you are able to.
- Gently massage all areas of your breasts being careful not to slide your fingers along the breast as this can cause skin damage - see below. Spend a few minutes massaging the breast/s before moving on.



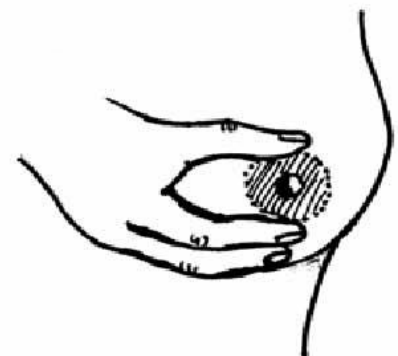
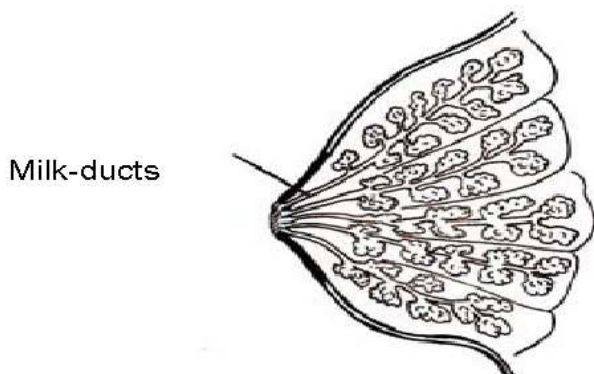
Use your fingertips in gentle circular movements



And/or gently roll your closed fist over your breast towards the nipple

### Technique to express milk

- Cup your breast and make a 'C' shape with your thumb and forefinger.
- Place your thumb and finger on opposite sides of the nipple, 3-4cm apart, or where the texture of the breast tissue feels different.
- Without sliding your fingers over the skin, gently squeeze your thumb and finger together. This shouldn't hurt. Release the pressure and squeeze again and again, building up a rhythm.
- It can take a little while before the colostrum appears, but this is perfectly normal - you may only see a few drops at first. The more you practice, the more colostrum will start to appear.
- Once the flow of colostrum has slowed down, rotate your fingers round to try a different part of the breast. When you have tried all parts of one breast, repeat the process on the other breast, you may feel confident to express from both breasts at the same time with support.
- Expressing from both breasts at the same time, whether by hand or pump, is said to increase milk volume and reduce the time taken. Pause for 30-60 seconds when the milk flow slows down to allow the ducts to refill.



## Expressing using a manual or electric pump

- It is useful to hand express prior to using an electric pump as it may reduce the time it takes for the milk to start flowing.
- Correctly assemble all sterilised equipment – provided in a pack by your midwife
- Support your breast if necessary.
- Place funnel centrally onto nipple and areola.
- Ensure suction dial is turned to its lowest setting (if relevant).
- Switch on and increase suction gradually to the maximum comfortable level. If it is uncomfortable then the suction is too high.
- Some pumps have ways of varying the speed, this tries to mimic the way a baby feeds— quick sucks at the start of a breastfeed followed by slower sucks as the milk flow increases and the baby settles into a breastfeed. Some dual phase pumps do this automatically.
- Swap breasts each time the milk slows down. This allows the milk ducts to refill with milk.
- *Always remember to switch the pump off before removing the funnel from your breast.*
- Stop after 20-40 minutes or when the milk stops flowing.

## Storing your breast milk at home

The lower the temperature of your fridge, the longer you can safely store your expressed milk. Below is a table as a guide:

PLACE	MAXIMUM TIME
<b>Fresh breastmilk</b>	Always store in a sealed container
Room	Can be kept at room temperature for up to 6 hours
Fridge: between 5-8°C	Can be kept at the back of a fridge for up to 3 days
Fridge: between 0-4°C	Can be kept at the back of a fridge for up to 5 days
Ice compartment	Can be stored in an ice compartment of a fridge for 2 weeks
<i>(if temperature rises above 4°C</i>	<i>after 3 days, use within 6 hours or throw away)</i>
Freezer: -18°C or lower	Can be stored in a deep freezer for 6 months
<b>Previously frozen breastmilk</b>	
Defrosted in fridge	Defrost in the fridge for 12 hours. Use as soon as possible after thawing
Defrosted outside fridge	Use immediately

- **Always wash your hands before expressing and handling breast milk.**
- **Always** use a sterile plastic container with a sealed lid to store your breast milk. Specially designed pre-sterilised bags are also suitable.

- Try to use a fresh storage container each time you collect milk. If necessary, newly collected milk may be cooled and added to previously stored milk collected on the same day.
- Label your milk container as breast milk with date and time of expressing.
- Expressed milk should be kept in the back of the fridge (rather than in the door) above and away from meat products, eggs or uncooked foods.
- **Remember—the more often your fridge door is opened the more likely the temperature will rise.**

## Using stored breast milk

- Ideally defrost frozen breast milk in the fridge. If needed quickly try defrosting under cool, then warm, running water. Thawed milk warmed to room temperature must be used straight away or discarded.
- Milk may be warmed to body temperature by standing the container in warm water for a few minutes. Do NOT use a microwave to defrost or warm breast milk. It is heated unevenly and could burn your baby's mouth.
- Stored milk may 'separate' out. Shake gently to mix before use.
- Thawed breast milk should never be refrozen, or reheated.

## Useful Contact Numbers

If after reading this leaflet you have any further queries regarding the expression of breast milk, the following may be useful:

Rothschild Ward (SMH)	<b>01296 316280</b>
Community Midwives Office (SMH)	<b>01296 255780</b>
Community Midwives Office (WH)	<b>01494 425172</b>

Infant Feeding Team, Rothschild Ward, Stoke Mandeville Hospital	Mobile: <b>07798 520830</b>
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## Other sources of help:

National Breastfeeding Helpline:	0300 100 0212	(9.30am-9.30pm)
NCT Breastfeeding Helpline:	0300 330 0700	(8am-10pm)
Breastfeeding Network Supporter line: <a href="http://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk">www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk</a>	0300 100 0210	(9.30am-9.30pm)
Association of Breastfeeding Mothers Helpline:	0300 100 0212	(9.30am-9.30pm)
La Leche League Helpline:	0345 120 2918	(8am-11pm)
Lactation consultants of Gt. Britain:	<a href="http://www.lcgb.org">www.lcgb.org</a>	
Ardo Breastpump Hire: <a href="https://www.ardobreastpumps.co.uk/shop/products/rent-a-breastpump/">https://www.ardobreastpumps.co.uk/shop/products/rent-a-breastpump/</a>	01823 336362	
Medela UK Ltd Breastpump Hire:	0161 766 0400	<a href="https://www.medela-rental.co.uk/">https://www.medela-rental.co.uk/</a>

Local breastfeeding support: Details from your health visitor or community midwife or the Infant Feeding pages found on our maternity pages on the trust website [www.buckshealthcare.nhs.uk](http://www.buckshealthcare.nhs.uk)

Please remember that this leaflet is intended as general information only. We aim to make the information as up to date and accurate as possible, but please note that it is subject to change. Please therefore always check specific advice on any concerns you may have with your doctor.

## **How can I help reduce healthcare associated infections?**

Infection prevention and control is important to the well-being of our patients and for that reason we have infection prevention and control procedures in place. Keeping your hands clean is an effective way of preventing the spread of infections. Please follow our infection prevention and control guidelines when visiting our healthcare sites. Further information is available on our website.

## **Patient Advice Sheet**

If you would like a copy of this information on audiotape, **in large print** or translated, please call the Patient Advice Liaison Service on 01296 831120 or email [bht.pals@nhs.net](mailto:bht.pals@nhs.net)

## **Division of Women, Children & Sexual Health Services**

### *Approvals:*

*Maternity Guidelines Group: Jul 2010, V4 Oct 2014, V5 Nov 2019, V6 Dec 2022*

*O&G SDU: May 07, Oct 2010. O&G SDU V4 Nov 2014, V5 Apr 2020, V6 20.1.23*

*Clinical Guidelines Subgroup: not required*

*BMV: Jan 07, Sep 2010, Jul 2019, V6 Oct 2022*

*Equality Impact Assessment: Jan 08, Feb 2019, V6 Dec 2022*

*Communications Advisory Panel: Feb 08, Oct 2019, V6 May 2023*