



Mercy Health
Care first

Your important health information

Expressing breastmilk

You may need to express if:

- Your baby cannot feed at the breast
- You are apart from your baby
- Your baby needs extra breastmilk
- Your breasts are very full
- You have sore nipples
- Your breastmilk supply is low

Before you start to express:

- Your midwife will teach you how
- Wash your hands before expressing
- Try to relax and sit comfortably. Take some mild pain relief if needed
- Cuddle your baby or give some kangaroo care as this can help the milk flow
- Gently massage and put some warmth on your breasts for a short time
- If you are not with your baby:
 - have a photo by you
 - smell something your baby has worn
 - think of your baby.

When do I express?

If your baby is not with you or your baby is not attaching:

- Start as soon as you can after your baby is born
- Aim to express at least 8 times in 24 hours, including 1-2 times overnight

more milk removed from the breast = more milk made

How much milk do I express?

Your breasts will make small amounts of colostrum (the first milk) for the first two to three days, which may range from a few drops to a few millilitres (mls).

- As this first milk changes to more mature milk, you will be able to express larger amounts.
- Express each breast until it is well drained or feels softer.
- Change between breasts two to three times during each expression when the flow slows, this may take around 30 minutes in total.
- If you are expressing more than your baby needs, the milk can be frozen for when your baby starts to take more.

Hand expressing



1. Before expressing, wash your hands
2. Gently massage breasts
3. Place your thumb and fingers opposite each other around the edge of your areola
4. Press your thumb and forefinger back towards your chest and compress your fingers and thumb gently together with a slight forward movement.
5. Avoid squeezing your nipple. This should not be painful.
6. Relax your fingers and thumb to lessen the squeeze but continue to keep your fingers/thumb touching your breast, continue to squeeze and relax, gradually moving your fingers around your areola to express your milk as much milk as possible
7. Express until milk flow slows to a few drops then change to the other breast
8. If your hand tires you can swap to the other hand or have a rest. Switch breasts two to three times for 10 or more minutes
9. Your colostrum can be collected in a clean medicine cup or sterile syringe.
10. Colostrum amounts may be very small but will increase if you keep expressing frequently.

For more information on hand expressing you can watch these videos:



Expressing the first milk, Global Health Media

<https://globalhealthmedia.org/videos/expressing-the-first-milk/>



Hand expressing, Australian Breastfeeding Association

<https://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/resources/hand-expressing>

Breast pump expressing

A hospital grade electric breast pump is best if you are expressing for all, or most feeds.

Expressing with a single pump

- Place the breast pump flange on your breast with your nipple in the middle.
- Start with the suction/vacuum on low and the speed/cycles on fast.
- Once the milk begins to flow – this may take a few minutes, slowly change the suction/vacuum to a stronger level to where it feels comfortable for you.
- Express the first breast until milk flow slows
 - switch to the second breast
 - do this again for each breast two to three times
 - express for 20-30 minutes in total.

Expressing with a double pump

- Using a double pumping kit is quicker and helps to keep your breast milk supply.
- Start by using the double kit with the settings as above.
- Express both breasts until milk flow slows.
- Stop expressing and massage both breasts gently.
- Start expressing again using either the double pump kit or express one breast at a time until you feel the breasts are well drained.
- Double pumping should take about 20 – 25 minutes in total.

If expressing is hurting:

- the pump settings may be too strong or too fast
- the breast pump flange may not be the right size for you
- check with a midwife or lactation consultant.

Points to remember when expressing

- Hand express for the first few days – this is the best way to get your colostrum:
 - you can also use an electric breast pump as extra stimulation at this stage, but keep suction/vacuum gentle and sessions short
 - using both hand and pump expressing soon after birth seems to give more milk.
- Expressing should not hurt – please tell your midwife if it is hurting.
- Gentle breast pressure or massage during expressing will help with the milk flow.

For more information on how to increase the amount you express by combining expressing with your hands and an electric breast pump, you can watch this video



Electric pump and hands-on Pumping, First Droplets

<https://vimeo.com/291806551>

Cleaning your breast pump

You need to clean all items used to feed your baby or express very well.

After each use:

- do not wash tubing or get water in it
- take apart breast pump parts and rinse in cold water
- wash well in hot soapy water – use a bottle brush on hard plastic parts
- rinse well in hot water
- leave to dry then store in a clean, covered container ready to use.

Further Information

If you have any questions regarding this information, please contact:

Mercy Hospital for Women

Breastfeeding Support Service
Phone: 8458 4677

Werribee Mercy Hospital

Breastfeeding Support Service
Phone: 8754 3407

Australian Breastfeeding Association Helpline
Phone: 1800 686 268 (24/7 – free)

Maternal & Child Health Line
Phone: 132 229 (24/7 – free)

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This document provides general information only and is not intended to replace advice about your health from a qualified practitioner. If you are concerned about your health, you should seek advice from a qualified practitioner.