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Expressing breast milk

Breastfeeding exclusively for the first six months, and sustained for up to two years or longer with appropriate complementary feeding is important for the nutrition, immunologic protection, growth, and development of infants and toddlers and has many benefits for you as well.

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Expressing breast milk is an option to consider once you are comfortable with breastfeeding. Expressing and storing breast milk can offer many benefits to mothers including a few additional hours of uninterrupted sleep ^[6], alone or work time, or the ability to return to work while continuing to exclusively breastfeed your baby. You may even want to learn how to express breast milk to help relieve breast fullness prior to breastfeeding your baby or to use a small amount as a natural moisturizer for your nipples after a feeding. Expressing breast milk allows other family members ^[7] to be involved in the feeding ritual. It's also easier than many think, and with practice can be performed quickly and easily, even by hand. Renting or buying a pump is also a convenient option. A lactation consultant ^[8] or healthcare professional can help you to choose an appropriate method.

Expressing breast milk: Step-by-step

To express milk by hand, simply follow these instructions:

- Wash your hands with soap and water.
- Sit or stand comfortably and place a clean wide-necked cup under your breast either in your lap or on the table.
- Massage your breasts with both hands.
- Place your thumb on top of your breast and first finger underneath the breast so that they are opposite each other on the edge of the areola (about 4 cm from the tip of the nipple) while supporting your breast with the rest of your hand.
- Push gently back towards your chest wall.
- Gently roll your fingers and thumb toward your nipple while applying slight pressure.
- Release the pressure and repeat this step. Get into a rhythm. If milk does not appear re-position your finger and thumb either closer or further from the nipple and try again, be patient.
- Switch hands to empty all areas of the breast.
- Switch breasts whenever the flow of milk slows down.

You may only get a few drops when first learning to express, but it will get better and easier with practice. Expressing breast milk can also be done using a manual or electric breast pump. Regular pumping will maintain your milk production, so should you want to continue to provide your baby with breast milk but are unavailable to breastfeed, you can still do so.

Storing breast milk

When storing breast milk, it is important that you seal the expressed milk in an airtight container and label it with the date and time. There are a number of ways that you can store breast milk:

- At room temperature for up to 6 hours.
- In the refrigerator for 3 days.
- In the freezer for about 3 months.
- In a chest freezer for about 6 months.

Breastfeeding support aids

Most moms plan to exclusively breastfeed right from the start. But for some moms, latching baby to the breast can be challenging [9]. Your doctor or lactation consultant may discuss with you using breastfeeding support aids to help feed your newborn. Also known as lactation aids, breastfeeding support aids are short-term solutions, typically used for a few days, to help get both you and baby on track with successful breastfeeding at the breast.

Some methods that may be discussed include:

- Using a small medical cup.
- Feeding expressed milk through a lactation aid (a small feeding tube at your breast).
- Feeding expressed milk through a tube taped to your finger.
- Feeding expressed milk through a baby bottle. See tips on introducing a bottle of expressed milk [10] now.
- Preferred brand of ready to feed infant formula fed through any of the above methods.

Rest assured that feeding your newborn breast milk in a bottle or by another method as recommended by your lactation consultant or supplementing with formula is common practice that can help you and your baby as you adjust to a feeding routine.

Find breastfeeding help when you need it most

Most difficulties can be easily managed. You may simply need a few answers or a little guidance along the way. If you get support quickly, you'll be more likely to persevere with breastfeeding and be happy that you did. Some hospitals, community clinics or public health units also offer breastfeeding clinics to assist you in the community.

- Ask your doctor, midwife, or lactation consultant.
- If your baby was born in a hospital, most run breastfeeding clinics.
- Call your local health department and speak with a public health nurse.
- Talk to breastfeeding support group and find a local representative in the phone book or online.

[Read more](#) [11]

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