

Information sheet

Expressing breastmilk

It is important to learn how to hand express your breastmilk before you go home from hospital. The midwives will help you to do this.

Why express your milk?

- If your breasts are full and uncomfortable.
- To soften the breast to help your baby to attach.
- To give your baby expressed milk if they are small, sick or just not attaching.
- If your milk supply is low.
- To clear blocked areas or mastitis.
- To continue milk flow during mastitis.
- If you are going back to work.
- If you need to be away from your baby for a period of time (e.g. Special event).

How to hand express your milk?

TIP Wash your hands thoroughly prior to expressing your breastmilk.

How to stimulate milk supply?

- Make yourself comfortable, so you are as relaxed as possible.
- Have your baby close or a photo if this is not possible.
- Use warm compresses or have a warm shower.
- Gently massage your breast to stimulate letdown of milk by rolling your nipple between your finger and thumb and gently stroking your breast towards your nipple in a rolling motion with a flat hand.

How to express by hand?



- Place your thumb and forefinger on the opposite sides of the nipple at about the border of the areola, 3-4cm back from the nipple.
- **PRESS** the finger and thumb together towards the chest without sliding the fingers on the skin and gently
- **COMPRESS** the breast tissue with a slight forward movement and hold briefly.
- **RELEASE** the breast tissue, allowing the milk ducts to refill and then repeat, creating a similar rhythm to a baby.
- When the flow stops rotate your fingers to another spot, around the edge of the areola, and begin again, repeating until all of the breast has been expressed.
- When flow decreases to only a few drops of milk, change breasts.
- Massage both breasts and repeat
- If you are able, express each side twice in a session.
- Colostrum can be collected in clean medicine cup or sterile syringe.

TIP At first you may only get a few drops, but keep going. With practice and time, milk will flow more easily.

We welcome feedback at:

Bairnsdale Regional Health Service PO Box 474 Bairnsdale VIC 3875
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The information in this brochure is intended as a guide to one of the services provided by BRHS and is correct at the time of publishing. Issue date: February 2019. Updated: January 2024 Our Ref: MS0011

Bairnsdale Regional Health Service is located on the traditional land of the Gunaikurnai people.

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How long will it take to express?

Breast milk expression will most likely take between 20 and 30 minutes altogether.

Importantly, express one breast until the milk flow slows to drips and then change to the other breast. If you are expressing for **low milk supply**, you can change back to the first breast again. Going back and forth expressing both breasts will eventually increase your milk supply.

How much milk can be expressed?

The amount of milk you will get varies and is dependent on individual circumstances and the stage of breastfeeding.

In the early days a few drops to a few mls of colostrum maybe expressed each time. Then as your milk changes from colostrum to more mature milk this amount increases and by day five this may be around 50-70 mls increasing to 80-120mls by the end of the first week.

Everyone is different and these amounts will vary from mother to mother, if you have any concerns about your milk supply, not being enough to feed your baby please ask for help.

Tips

- Hand expressing should be used in the first few days post birth (before your milk comes in) you may choose to use a pump after your colostrum changes to more mature milk.

- Hand express a little milk before a feed if your breasts are very full, so baby can attach well.

If for any reason your baby is unable to breastfeed, express as soon as possible after birth. Frequent expressing (8 to 10 times) in 24 hours and overnight will help to establish and maintain your milk supply.

Guidelines for storage of breast milk at home

Breast milk status	Room temperature (26°C or lower)	Refrigerator (4°C or lower)	Freezer
Freshly expressed into container	6-8 hours If refrigerator is available store milk there	3-5 days Store at back where it is coldest	2 weeks in freezer compartment inside refrigerator 3 months in freezer section of refrigerator with separate door 6-12 months in deep freeze (-18°C or lower)
Previously frozen thawed in refrigerator but not warmed	4 hours or less - that is, the next feeding	24 hours	Do not refreeze
Thawed outside refrigerator in warm water	For completion of feeding	4 hours or until next feeding	Do not refreeze
Infant has begun feeding	Only for completion of feeding	Discard	Discard

For more information and advice

Contact the Midwives, Maternal & Child Health Nurse or Australian Breastfeeding Association

Acknowledgement: Monash (2023) "Monash Newborn Early Expressing of Breastmilk"

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