

Breast Milk: Expression and Storage

When you breastfeed, you are providing the very best nourishment and the gift of a healthy start for your baby.

If you are getting ready to return to work or school, it is possible to successfully combine work or school with breastfeeding. Breastmilk is available on a supply and demand basis. Breastfeeding often and/or pumping your milk will help keep a good milk supply. Start expressing milk one to two weeks before you start work or school.

Milk can be expressed with a breast pump or by hand.

Pumping and hand expression is a learned skill. You get better by practicing.

Collection guidelines:

- Always wash hands well before handling the milk or collection equipment.
- Wash breast pump equipment that touches the breast, milk or collection containers in hot, soapy water. Rinse thoroughly and air dry on a clean towel
- Good times to express milk are in the morning or when the baby has not completely emptied the milk in the breast. Also, try to express or pump milk midway between feedings. If your baby skips a feeding, nurses a shorter time than usual, or only nurses on one side, you can pump out the rest of the milk and save it.

Picture of breast pump

Picture of hand positioning

Hand Expression of Breastmilk:

- Gently massage your breasts.
- Place your fingers and thumb as shown in the picture. Your fingers should be behind the darker area (areola). Gently push back toward your chest, then gently press forward and release your breast. Do this several times until your milk begins to flow.
- Express your milk into a clean bowl or cup.
- Rotate your hand around your breast and continue to express.

Breast Pumping:

- Pump about 15 - 20 minutes at a time when using a single pumping kit. Switch breasts when the milk flow decreases (or about every 5 minutes). If double pumping, expect to pump for around 10-15 minutes.
- Electric double pumping is best because it is most effective in keeping good milk supply and the fastest in pumping milk from the breast
- Not all pumps are good. Ask your health care provider or lactation specialist which ones are good to use.

Storage

Helpful Hints •

- Always wash your hands before handling the milk.
- Rotate your stock. Use the oldest milk first
- Store milk in small quantities, 3 - 4oz. Label all storage containers with a date.
- When freezing your breast milk leave some space at the top of the container.
Breastmilk like most liquid expands as it freezes.

How long can I store my milk?

- Breastmilk will be safe at room temperature for up to 6 hours.
- If you are planning to use the milk within the next few days, refrigerate it right away. The milk will be safe in the refrigerator for up to 72 hours (3 days)
- Breastmilk can be frozen in the freezer for up to 3 months.

How do I defrost my frozen milk?

- To defrost frozen milk, place it in a pan of warm water or defrost in the refrigerator.
- After defrosting, your milk may separate, with the fat on top. The milk can look a little yellow, orange, white or even clear. Just shake the milk up to mix it.
- Never microwave breastmilk. Microwaving can change the milk's composition and can create hot areas that can burn your baby's mouth.

Picture of mother and baby

How long can I keep my frozen milk after thawing?

- If you thaw the breastmilk in the refrigerator, it will be safe for up to 24 hours (1 day.)
- If you thaw the breastmilk in the warm water, use right away or keep up to 4 hours.

Do not refreeze *thawed milk!!*

For additional information, please contact:

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