

Guide to expressing milk

You may need to express milk if you are away from your baby for any length of time, or if you are returning to work but want to continue to feed breastmilk. Whichever method you use, it's important to make sure your hands are clean and that all bottles, containers and pump pieces are washed and sterilised. Before expressing, massage your breasts to encourage the milk to flow.



Expressing by hand

Place your first finger under the breast, towards the edge of the areola, and your thumb on top of your breast. Keeping your finger and thumb in the same places, gently press backwards and then, maintaining the pressure, push forwards easing the milk towards the nipple. Release the pressure and repeat. You'll need to use a container with a wide opening to collect the milk.



Hand pumping

These pumps have a funnel which you place over the nipple and areola. Some are operated by a lever and others run on batteries. Again, it's best to massage your breasts before expressing and then follow the instructions that come with your particular pump.



Electric pumps

Fast and easy to use, these pumps are good if you need to express for an extended period, for example if your baby is in a Special Care Baby Unit. It's possible to express 3–8 times a day and you can also pump both breasts at once. You can hire electric pumps from the National Childbirth Trust and other breastfeeding organisations. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully.



Storing breastmilk

Expressed breastmilk must be stored in a sterilised container such as a baby's bottle, special storage jars or bags, or disposable bottle liners. You can keep them in the fridge for up to five days at 4C or lower, for two weeks in the ice compartment of a fridge and for up to six months in a freezer – make sure you label them with the date of expressing and the volume of milk inside.

IMPORTANT NOTICE: Breastfeeding is best for babies and provides many benefits. It is important that, in preparation for and during breastfeeding, you eat a healthy, balanced diet. Combined breast and bottlefeeding in the first weeks of life may reduce the supply of your own breastmilk, and reversing the decision not to breastfeed is difficult. The social and financial implications of using an infant milk should be considered. Improper use of an infant milk or inappropriate foods or feeding methods may present a health hazard. If you use an infant milk, you should follow manufacturer's instructions for use carefully – failure to follow the instructions may make your baby ill. Always consult your doctor, midwife or health visitor for advice about feeding your baby.

Healthcare professional helpline
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