

Expressing Your Milk

What is expressed milk?

Human milk that has been hand expressed or pumped so that it can be given to your baby by spoon, cup or bottle.

Hand expression is a helpful skill to learn when you have a new baby, regardless of how you feed them. You may want to express your milk if:

- you need to collect colostrum or milk if baby can't feed at the breast or chest yet or if you are apart
- you need a few drops of milk to rub on your nipples to keep them healthy
- you need to soften your very full breast or chest so your baby can latch well
- you're trying to interest your baby in latching
- you're trying to increase or keep up your milk supply
- you'll be away from your baby for longer than a few hours
- you're going back to work



DID YOU KNOW?

If your baby was born prematurely, you can help them get the best start on breastfeeding or chestfeeding by:

- learning how to hand express colostrum early
- expressing and pumping your milk often
- holding your baby skin-to-skin as much as possible
- offering your breast or chest as soon as your baby is stable (see [Special Birth Issues](#))



DID YOU KNOW?

In pregnancy you begin producing milk, called colostrum, early in the second trimester.

If you have a low-risk pregnancy you can begin hand expression at 36 weeks, unless advised not to by your doctor or midwife. Prenatal hand expression helps you practice expressing your milk before your baby arrives. You can collect and store your colostrum which may be helpful in the early days if your baby needs extra milk.

When to Hand Express Your Milk

- during low-risk pregnancies, from 36 weeks on
- to practice expressing your milk before your baby arrives
- to collect colostrum in case your baby needs extra in the early days after birth

Discuss with your health care provider if hand expressing is a good choice for you. To learn more about expressing and storing your milk during pregnancy see lllc.ca/prenatal-colostrum-expression

How to Express Your Milk

You can express your milk:

1. by hand
2. with a hand pump
3. with an electric pump

Helpful hints:

- Before you start, wash your hands and get comfortable.
- Gently massage your breast or chest before expressing to help the milk let down.
- Be patient. Expressing is quicker for some people than others. It can take a bit of time before the first drops appear. And at first, you may only be able to get a few drops or none at all. This will increase with practice and as your milk supply builds.
- To encourage your milk to flow ("let down") try applying a warm cloth to your breast or chest or snuggling skin-to-skin with your baby.

Expressing, like breastfeeding or chestfeeding, takes practice and support. You can practise as soon as your baby is born, or even before. If you need help, talk with your health care provider or public health nurse or call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1.

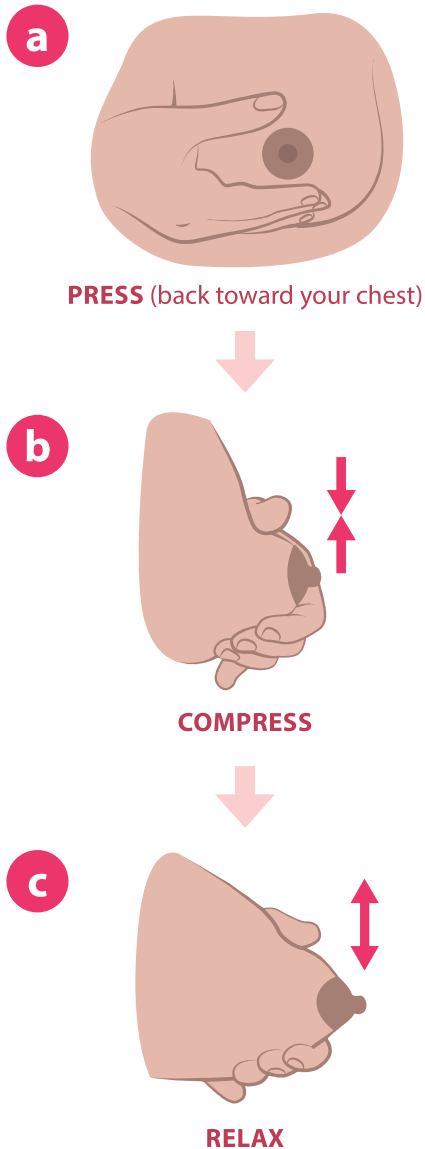


DID YOU KNOW?

Hand expression is the best way to collect colostrum – your first, nutrient-rich milk.

Using your hands

You don't need any special equipment to express your milk. Hand expressing is an important skill, but it takes practice. With time, you'll figure out what works best for you.



HOW TO Express your milk by hand

1. Wash your hands well with soap and water.
2. Hold your baby skin-to-skin.
3. Gently massage your breasts or chest to help start the flow of milk.
4. Hold your breast or chest gently with one hand. Your thumb and fingers should be opposite each other and about 2½ to 4 cm (1 to 1½ inches) back from the nipple.
5. Place a clean container with a wide opening in front of you or hold it under your breast or chest to catch the milk. If you're collecting colostrum, a clean spoon will work.
6. Press gently back toward your chest wall. Don't squeeze the base of your nipple, because this will stop the flow of milk.
7. Relax your fingers, then repeat the same motion.
8. Move your hand around to express from your entire breast or chest. Switch your hands and sides as often as you like.
9. It should feel comfortable and without pain. Adjust as needed.

For more information try this video, Hand Expressing Milk, from HealthLink BC: healthlinkbc.ca/pregnancy-parenting/parenting-babies-0-12-months/breastfeeding/video-hand-expressing-breastmilk

Using a pump

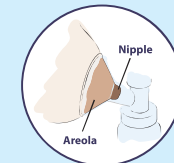
You can use a hand pump or an electric pump. An electric pump may let you express both sides at the same time, is faster and more efficient and may be the best choice if you'll be expressing milk often. Whichever you use, be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions about how to use and clean it.

Pumping should be comfortable. If it makes your nipples sore, try adjusting the suction and check that the flange (the part that forms a seal over your nipple) is the right size.

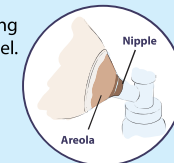
Flange size will vary between pump companies and brands. You may need different flange sizes for each breast or sides of your chest, and the sizes may change over time. If you continue to have problems, discuss with your health care provider.

Proper fit

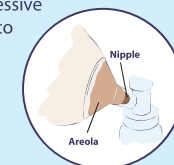
CORRECT FIT
The nipple is centred and moves freely.



TOO SMALL
The nipple rubs along the side of the tunnel. Try a larger size. Some parents need a different size on each side.



TOO BIG
The nipple and excessive areola are pulled into the tunnel. Try a smaller size. Some parents need a different size on each side.



Thinking of renting, borrowing or buying a used mechanical pump?

Most pumps are very hard to disinfect and are not meant to be used by more than one person. Your health care provider can help you find the best option for you.



DID YOU KNOW?

If your baby is given a bottle, they may start to refuse your breast or chest. If you're going to offer your expressed milk, it's best to wait until you and your baby have settled into a breastfeeding or chestfeeding routine – usually around 4 to 6 weeks.



DID YOU KNOW?

With a cooler and frozen gel packs, you can safely transport expressed human milk for up to 24 hours. Use gel packs – not regular ice, which isn't as cold. Make sure the gel packs are in direct contact with the milk container. And don't open the cooler if you don't need to. If you're transporting milk to or from a milk bank, follow their instructions.



TRY THIS

If you leak milk from one nipple as your baby feeds from the other, tuck a small, clean, BPA-free container under the leaking nipple while your baby is feeding. Safely store the milk to use later.

Storing Your Milk

Put your expressed milk in feeding-sized portions into clean, food-grade, BPA-free bags or containers with lids. Don't use baby bottle liners, which can break. Leave extra space for the milk to expand as it freezes, then label it with the date and time and store it in the main compartment (not the door) of the fridge or in the freezer. You can add freshly expressed milk to older milk that has never been frozen, but be sure to cool the new milk first.

How long can you safely store freshly expressed human milk?★

	Freshly expressed milk	Milk thawed in fridge but not warmed
Room temperature 25°C (77°F) or colder	up to 6 hours	up to 4 hours
Refrigerator 4°C (39.2°F)	up to 5 days	up to 24 hours
Freezer (separate door freezer on fridge) -18°C (-0.4°F) or colder	up to 6 months	Do not refreeze
Deep freezer -20°C (-4°F)	up to 12 months	

★ These recommendations are for healthy full-term babies only. If your baby was born prematurely, has a health condition, or in emergency situations, safe storage times are much shorter. Talk with your health care provider or call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1.

Using Expressed Milk

When you give your baby expressed milk, you can use:

- a glass
- a cup, like a small medicine measure cup
- a spoon
- a bottle made of glass or BPA-free hard plastic

Thoroughly wash all bottles, containers and pump parts after every use (see [Cleaning and Disinfecting Feeding Equipment](#)). Use the milk with the earliest date on the label first. When a feeding is done, throw away any leftover milk.

Frozen milk

It's best to thaw frozen milk in the fridge. But if you need the milk right away, run the container or bag under warm tap water or put it in a clean bowl or mug of warm water. Don't let the water touch the lid of the container or the top of the bag. Once thawed, gently swirl the milk. Thaw only what you need for one feeding.

Milk stored in the fridge

You can give your baby expressed milk right from the fridge. But if you want to warm it, run the container or bag under warm tap water or put it in a bowl of warm water. Don't let the water touch the lid of the container, the top of the bag or the nipple of the bottle.



BE AWARE

Don't use the stove or microwave to heat human milk. It can heat unevenly and burn your baby. If you use a commercial milk warmer, follow the manufacturer's directions carefully.